

# *The Windrow*

Newsletter of The Scythe Association of Britain and Ireland

No 1 February 2011

## The Scythe Association is Born

Two thousand years after the arrival of the scythe on the shores of the British Isles, an association has been formed to promote its use. On 15 January a dozen scythesmen and women met in Oxford and founded SABI, the Scythe Association of Britain and Ireland

The Scythe Association has the following objectives:

- To promote the use of the scythe throughout Britain;.
- To improve mowing skills through training and the broadcast of information;
- To promote the advantages of the scythe to government, local authorities and national organizations;
- To enhance communication amongst mowers and between mowers and landowners and other sectors;
- To promote the study of the history of the scythe and allied technologies;
- To maintain standards of manufacture and supply of scythes and ancillary equipment.

Over the course of this year we will be publishing this newsletter, setting up a website, and organizing a gathering next winter, whose purpose will be to share information and identify projects for the coming year.

If you are on the current mailing list, you will be regarded as a member of the association, and will continue to receive copies of the newsletter until the end of 2011, when you will be invited to join the association, at the cost of a small fee to cover our expenses.

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The next issue of the newsletter will appear in late April or early May. 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](mailto:chapter7@tlio.org.uk) 01297 561359; Monkton Wyld Court, Charmouth, Bridport, DT6 6DQ. If you require a paper copy please get in touch.

# Scythe Events

## The Eastern Counties Scything Competition

The Fourth Eastern Counties Scything Competition will be held on 26 June at Wimpole Estate Cambridgeshire

Events include: demonstrations of scything, hay making and other rural skills, blacksmithing, pole lathes, cleaving wattle & gate hurdle making, heavy horse hay making demonstrations, heavy horses mowing, spoon making competition home made cider competition, team mowing and scythe v strimmer Hay stack race Peening competition Smallholder stalls and rural crafts Local beer festival Competition for sprint mowing starts at 3pm Competition for marathon mowing timed at any time over weekend

Those interested in the competition please email me with their details before the 20 June so I know the approximate number of entrants.

Contact: Simon Damant  
simon.damant@nationaltrust.org.uk



"Looks like the competition's going to be tough this year" -

## West Country Scythe Fair

The Seventh West Country Scythe Festival and Green Fair will be held at the same site as normal, Thorney Lakes near Muchelney, Langport, on Sunday 12 June 2011.

Scythe and hay making events include the mowing championship, team mowing, scythe versus strimmer, peening, haymaking skills etc. Plus a wide array of stalls, a craft area, a music stage, speakers, theatre, a kids area, etc etc.

On the Saturday 11 June before there will be a beginner's scythe course, and there will also be a course teaching people how to teach mowing on the Thursday and Friday 9-10 (for details see Courses, page 3)

www.thescytheshop.co.uk/festival.html  
www.greenfair.org.uk/  
email chapter7@tlio.org.uk

## Cumbria Scythe Festival, Langdale Valley 2-3 July

See <http://scytherspace.wordpress.com/>

## Liverpool

Urban Scything festival, July date to be confirmed.

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

## Transylvania

There is a week long scythe and haymaking festival in Transylvania, August 20-28 2011

Details of 2011 event will be posted at [www.savortransylvania.com/index.php/visit/events/83-haymaking-festival](http://www.savortransylvania.com/index.php/visit/events/83-haymaking-festival), or email [chapter7@tlio.org.uk](mailto:chapter7@tlio.org.uk)

## Scythe Competition in Germany

28 May 2011 at Salbitz, Saxony.

For more information email [sander.salbitz@](mailto:sander.salbitz@)

# Opportunities

## Helpers Needed at West Country Scythe Fair

Would you like to join a team of helpers to assist with preparing the scythe events at the West Country Scythe Fair. The fair now attracts over 2,500 people and over 75 stalls. Helpers on the site crew are needed from Tuesday 7 June through to Monday 13. We provide food and drink, and we give people who help throughout the week £100 worth of scythe tuition, and/or scythe goods. It helps if you can attend a planning meeting in Dorset in April or May.

For information e-mail Simon at [chapter7@tlio](mailto:chapter7@tlio) tel 01297 561359

## South West Mowers

Andy Coleman wants to help set up a Somerset/South West scythe group. If anyone else is interested, please contact him at [ajcenvironmental@googlemail.com](mailto:ajcenvironmental@googlemail.com)

**THE NEXT NEWSLETTER WILL APPEAR BY EARLY MAY**

**PLEASE SEND US ANY ADVERTS, ANNOUNCEMENTS ETC BY 15 APRIL**

## Mini Apprenticeships

Simon Fairlie has a limited number of spaces for "mini-apprentices" on his smallholding at Monkton Wyld community. In exchange for 10 days work on the smallholding, you get tuition in scythe use, food, lodging and scythe goods worth £100. Work includes haymaking (when weather permits), mowing weeds, mowing lawns, dairy work and horticulture. Applicants are expected to have a basic level of competence in general tool use.

For more information please e-mail Simon at [chapter7@tlio.org.uk](mailto:chapter7@tlio.org.uk); tel 01297 561359

# Scythe Courses

## Courses at the West Country Scythe Fair

Learn how to mow on Saturday and enter the competition on Sunday! There will be a course for both beginners and improvers on Saturday 11 June the day before the West Country Scythe Fair, led by Christiane Lechner from Austria, with help from Simon Fairlie, Phil Batten — with workshops in the afternoon on peening, grassland management, repairing blades etc. It will be held at Thorney Lakes, Muchelney, near Langport ([www.thorneylakes.co.uk](http://www.thorneylakes.co.uk)) Camping available or B and B nearby.

Contact Simon at  
chapter7@tlio.org.uk 01297 561359

## Dorset/Devon

Simon Fairlie gives courses at Monkton Wyld near Axminster.

One day courses on 7 May and 21 May. Two day courses, including hay making and grassland management: 8-10 July and 9-11 September.

Simon also takes on people for "mini-apprenticeships" see page 2

For more information see: [www.thescytheshop.co.uk/courses.html](http://www.thescytheshop.co.uk/courses.html) chapter7@tlio.org.uk

## Devon

Alastair Inglis has the following Beginner's Courses (date to be confirmed).

- Exeter Community Agriculture site, Shillingford Gt. George: Scything Refresher and Workday - Late April,
- Wayfield Nurseries, East Prawle, S. Hams
- West Town Farm, Nr Exeter:

Scything Refresher & Peening - May, .  
Scything Course - June, Date  
[www.westtownfarm.co.uk/aboutus.html](http://www.westtownfarm.co.uk/aboutus.html).

### Demonstrations:

Underwood Discovery Centre, Beeson, May, Shillingford Organics (Open Evening), July,

For details and further information contact Alastair on 07796-805453, or email [al.inglis@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:al.inglis@yahoo.co.uk)

## Nottinghamshire

Ray Lister has been giving courses in Nottinghamshire for the last 5 years  
Phone number: 01777 248610

## Camb/Herts

Simon Damant has a beginners course at the Eastern Counties Scythe Festival on 25 June. See page 2.



## Teachers' Training Course

Phil Batten describes his approach to teaching peening at the Teacher's Training Course held in the run up to last year's West Country Scythe Fair. We will be holding a teacher's training course at the Scythe Fair this year, on 9 and 10 June, with Christiane Lechner from Austria, Phil Batten and Simon Fairlie as instructors. People on the teachers course will be able to practice teaching on beginners on Saturday.

If you are interested in attending such a course, please email [chapter7@tlio.org.uk](mailto:chapter7@tlio.org.uk)

## Carmarthenshire

Phil Batten and Michelle Laine hold courses and workshops in Carmarthenshire. Their programme is as follows:

Sharpening and Peening Workshop:  
Saturday 9th July

Beginners Scythe Courses: Saturday 28th May, Saturday 25th June, and Saturday 13th August

Two Day Scythe Course, for the more experienced scyther or adventurous beginner: 16th/17th July

Bespoke Courses can be run for groups, on request, on any aspect of scything and hand hay making.

Contact Philip or Michelle at [scythecymru@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:scythecymru@yahoo.co.uk) or 07813 464990. Dyfed Permaculture Farm Trust, Penboyr, Drefach Felindre, SA44 5HG.

## Lincolnshire

Deano Martin gives scythe courses on his 4 acre smallholding, which has been managed with a scythe and sheep for the last four years.

<http://grinningreaper.wordpress.com/> Or ring 01507 588543.

## Herefordshire

Introduction to Scything, Saturday 23rd of July 10am-1pm, Little Dewchurch Church, Herefordshire. Free to participants. More workshops will be happening this summer.

Andrea at Caring for God's Acre 01568 611154, [info@cfga.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:info@cfga.fsnet.co.uk), [www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk](http://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk)

## Cumbria

Steve Tomlin and Paul King-north provide tuition in Cumbria.

Learn to Mow with Paul King-north: 8 May, 5 June, 24 July  
[paul@paulkingsnorth.net](mailto:paul@paulkingsnorth.net)

Learn to Mow with Steve Tomlin: 29 May, 30 July

Improve your Peening with Steve Tomlin: 30 Sept

There is also the possibility of a snath-making course in the autumn this year, please contact Steve to express your interest.

[steve-tomlin@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:steve-tomlin@hotmail.co.uk)  
See <http://scytherspace.wordpress.com/>

## Brighton

There will be a two day course for beginners with Simon Fairlie at Brighton Permaculture Group's place at Stanmer on 30 /31 July 2011.  
See <http://www.brightonpermaculture.org.uk>

## Shropshire

Acton Scott Historic Farm, Salop: Scything Course and Peening, 9,10 July, with Alastair Inglis.

[www.actonscott.com/courses.php](http://www.actonscott.com/courses.php)  
01694 781307

## West Sussex

Simon Fairlie is giving a beginner's course at the Weald and Downland Museum, on May 13.

[www.wealddown.co.uk](http://www.wealddown.co.uk) 01243 811931

# The Celtic Beetle

by Chris Hayes

A friend of mine told me that one of the reasons he moved from the UK to Ireland in the mid 1980's was that the councils here still used scythes to cut the road verge.

Well they don't any more and I wonder if he will be moving back the other way soon. Everyone has heard the story of official Ireland over the last year or so, from rags to riches and now back again, but now there are reparations to be paid, and its not just financial. The rural landscape is one of the victims of the mauling of the Celtic tiger, poor planning laws and corrupt politicians allowed developers to build a jumbled mass of crumby estates and one-off Dallas type mansions. Farmers were been offered €100,000 per acre by the local bank funded developer and farms with 'road frontage' were carved up and paved. The older generation of farmers were told to let the big contractors get on with consolidating bigger and bigger fields so that the subsidised tractors and combines could get on with industrial scale agriculture.

This was the Ireland I arrived back to in 2003, to take on my grandfathers 14 acre smallholding in Co. Wexford. I grew up in Wexford, a busy town whose current street layout was established by the Vikings, attracted to it by the large sheltered harbour. As a townie, my knowledge of farming was limited to allotment type growing in the town so looking out over 14 acres was a bit daunting and I soon realised that grass management was going to be a priority. The local Department of Agriculture official suggested turning the existing nine fields and the ash-hazel copse into four fields and contracting out the hay. My neighbour said I would have been better off staying in New York than coming back to this and in the meantime an old school friend turned 'developer' suggested a golf driving range. It was at the local farmer's market that I met Dennis Shannon, a lifelong farmer and smallholder. When I mentioned to him about my place he said he would come out and have a look. As we walked around the conversation turned from horse power to scythes to permaculture to farms feeding the towns and we both relaxed. It is always a good day when you meet someone who has an open fertile mind for an exchange of ideas and, more importantly, who is willing to muck in help turn the ideas into something made visible.

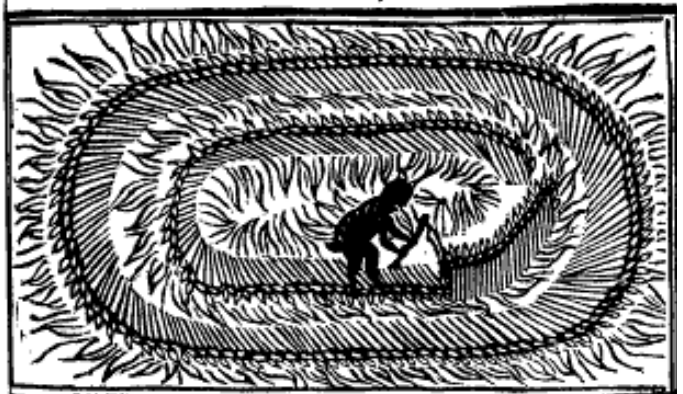
The scythe is one of those ideas made visible, it suggests so much when I see it hanging on the wall or lying

ready in the field. And yet there is also something invisible about all that it does and suggests. I can't see its fine edge down there in the heavy grass cleanly slicing the lodged stalks, I only feel it through my arms and hear that wonderful sound it makes. Or when standing before the uncut field holding it at the ready, in that moment of taking it all in, I start to see the lines of latitude and longitude that I will move across. The scythe will cut and leave along those lines, again making its mark on what is at first invisible.

When I found Simon and ordered my scythe I was excited at the prospect of conquering all that grass, but as my honing and peening skills also fell into that category of invisible or nonexistent, I was soon found wanting. It wasn't until I attended Simon's course in Ireland that things started to look up. It was also at this course that I met many others who were inspired to use the scythe. There is an old saying in the West of Ireland that, roughly translated, says 'All the black beetles will hide alone but will always find the others when needed'. This was reinforced when I attended the teacher training course at the Scythe Fair last year and now that I have been selling and training in Ireland it seems possible that one day soon those visiting here may see the local councils out cutting with scythes again

## The Mowing-Devil : Or, Strange NEWS out of Hartford-shire.

Being a True Relation of a Farmer, who Bargaining with a Poor Mower, about the Cutting down Three Half Acres of Oats; upon the Mower's asking too much, the Farmer swore, *That the Devil should Mow it, rather than He*: And so it fell out, that that very Night, the Crop of Oats shew'd as if it had been all of a Flame; but next Morning appear'd so neatly Mow'd by the Devil, or some Infernal Spirit, that no Mortal Man was able to do the like. Also, How the said Oats ly now in the Field, and the Owner has not Power to fetch them away.



Licenced, August 22th. 1678.

## Scythe Islands?

I haven't had time to research the possibilities of this one yet, but I read that the RSPB is trying to encourage farmers to create "Skylark Patches" in crops to encourage birds nesting - either by turning off the seed drill during sowing, or by mowing down later. Wondered whether promoting scythe use for this application might lead to any leads or work for scythespeople? What does the Association think?

Alastair Inglis

# Scythe Versus Lawnmower in the 21st Century?

by Richard Brown

Two things in the last year have lead me to re-evaluate the use of a scythe for mowing lawns; the rising cost of fuel (both in pounds and environmentally) and a change in attitude to grassland management in gardens. Both these factors come together to make the use of the scythe for lawns more attractive than was the case previously.

I recently tried to find out how much fuel petrol mowers actually consume. I had just watched an item on my local TV news in which a landscape contractor was complaining about not being able to keep pace with the rise in cost of petrol for the lawn mowers, strimmers and other powered equipment he used in his business.

As I discovered it is actually quite difficult to get fuel consumption figures for lawn mowers. Mower manufacturers make vague statements like "with increased fuel efficiency" but none seem to give actual figures.

There seem to be just one group of mower facts that get quoted worldwide in the media. Each week-end about 54 million Americans mow their lawns. Over a year they use 800 million gallons of petrol, accidentally spill 17 million gallons of fuel whilst re-fuelling (more than the Exxon Valdez) and contribute as much as five percent of the nation's air pollution, (according to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)). A Swedish study conducted in 2001 also concluded, "Air pollution from cutting grass for an hour with a gasoline powered lawn mower is about the same as that from a 100-mile automobile ride."

Scythes went out of favour for mowing lawns soon after



A lawn is an good place to teach beginners the basic action of mowing.

the invention of the first lawn mower by Edwin Budding in 1827. It is easier to produce a perfect level cut with a lawn mower and requires far less skill. A scythe (even handled by a champion mower) cannot compete with a powered lawn mower for work rate, nor can it collect the clippings.

Mowing a lawn with a scythe is however very satisfying. Scything a lawn is a different experience as compared to mowing a meadow. I find that mowing a lawn with a scythe is a good opportunity to develop quality of finish and stretch to mow a wider swath. Last summer I cut a tennis court sized lawn (250m<sup>2</sup>) in 40 minutes. My scything did not produce a bowling green finish – but then

having perfect manicured lawns has never been my personal priority.

## 'Greener' lawns

Garden designer Dan Pearson in a article in the Observer last summer (13th June 2010), advocated a greener and more relaxed approach to lawns in gardens. "Lawns are high maintenance and if you choose to aspire to a weed- and moss-free sward, you will have to employ a considerable gambit of chemicals to keep them that way."

The reality in practice for many gardeners Dan feels is that this level of effort and chemical inputs is unsustainable: as a result their lawns frequently fall short of expectation both in function and appearance.

There is an alternative for those able to take a more informal approach and to embrace rather than restrict natural diversity.

An informal turf like this containing wild flowers and grasses can be kept short by regular mowing for most of the year except for an interval of 6 – 8 weeks in June when you can enjoy a display of wild flowers and go to scythe festivals. This approach to lawn care is really made for scythe owners!

See <http://wildseed.co.uk/articles/2010/06/16/flowering-lawns-give-your-mower-a-holiday> for more on flowering lawns.



## Reed Cutting in Norfolk

In mid-December a few of us (Richard Brown, Simon Damant, Gemma Suggitt and Chris Riley) met to continue trials cutting reed with an Austrian scythe. The site was The Saltings, in Heacham, a small local nature reserve which Richard helps run.

Building on the last winter's trials with a simple willow bow, this year a small 'pricker' was added. Inspiration for this came from Eric Edwards, legendary marshman at How Hill in Norfolk, and his description on YouTube. Richard realised that the way to attach this pricker is to make a split in the bow, into which the sharpened peg is inserted. Lashing with string holds the pricker and split bow secure.

In practice the pricker works well, holding a handful of cut reed upright throughout the mowing stroke. Richard's YouTube film shows this - search for 'Norfolk reed 2010'. Perhaps a suitably placed pricker would also work on a cereal crop.



It is hoped that in the future there will be capacity for more people to join in and help with the reed cutting, and to provide opportunity for some winter mowing action.

Chris Riley

## One Day, God Asked St. Francis.....

GOD: Frank, you know all about gardens and nature, what in the world is going on down there in the U.S.? What in the world happened to the dandelions, violets, thistles and the stuff I started aeons ago? I had a perfect no-maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand drought and multiply with abandon. The nectar from the long lasting blossoms attracts butterflies, honey bees and flocks of songbirds. I expected to see a vast garden of color by now. All I see are patches of green.

ST. FRANCIS: It's the tribes that settled there, Lord. They are called Suburbanites. They started calling your flowers "weeds" and went to great lengths to kill them and replace them with grass.

GOD: Grass? But it is so boring, it's not colorful. It doesn't attract birds butterflies or bees, only grubs and sod worms. It's temperamental with temperatures. Do these Suburbanites really want grass growing there?

ST. FRANCIS: Apparently so, Lord. They go to great pains to grow it and keep it green. They begin each spring by fertilizing it and poisoning any other plant that crops up in the lawn.

GOD: The spring rains and warm weather probably make the grass grow really fast. That must make the Suburbanites very happy.

ST. FRANCIS: Apparently not, Lord. As soon as it has grown a little, they cut it-sometimes two times a week.

GOD: They cut it? Do they bale it like hay?

ST. FRANCIS: Not exactly Lord. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags.

GOD: They bag it? Why? Is it a cash crop? Do they sell it?

ST. FRANCIS: No sir, just the opposite. They pay to throw it away.

GOD: Now let me get this straight: They fertilize it to make it grow and when it does grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?

ST. FRANCIS: Yes, sir.

GOD: These Suburbanites must be relieved in the summer when we cut back on the rain and turn up the heat. That surely slows the growth and saves them a lot of work.

ST. FRANCIS! : You aren't going to believe this Lord. When the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it so they can continue to mow it and pay to get rid of it.

GOD: What nonsense! At least they kept some of the trees. That was a sheer stroke of genius, if I do say so myself. The trees grow leaves in the spring to provide beauty and shade in summer. In the autumn they fall to the ground and form a natural blanket to keep the moisture in the soil and protect the trees and bushes. Plus, as they rot, the leaves become compost to enhance the soil. It's a natural circle of life.

ST. FRANCIS: You'd better sit down, Lord. Instead, the Suburbanites rake them into great piles and pay to have them hauled away.

GOD: No way!! What do they do to protect the shrubs and tree roots in the winter to keep the soil moist and loose?

ST. FRANCIS: After throwing the leaves away they buy something called mulch. They haul it home and spread it around in place of the leaves.

GOD: And where do they get this mulch?

ST. FRANCIS: They cut down the trees and grind them up to make mulch.

GOD: Enough!! I don't want to think about this anymore. Saint Catherine, you're in charge of the arts. What movie is scheduled for us tonight?

ST. CATHERINE: "Dumb and Dumber". It's a real stupid movie about...

GOD: Never mind playing it --- I think I just heard the whole story from Saint Francis!

Taken from [www.scythesupply.com](http://www.scythesupply.com)

**There are estimated to be 30 million acres of lawn in the USA, producing enough grass to feed 6 million cows.**