

The Windrow

Newsletter of The Scythe Association of Britain and Ireland

No 5 January 2013



A taste of summer for cows at Monkton Wyld, SABI's HQ.

Happy New Year and a Well Earned Rest to All Mowers

Scythe Association Winter Gathering

This year we are holding the SABI winter meeting on the 26th and 27th January at John Lett's farm near Great Missenden in Buckinghamshire (Wren Davis Dairies, 100 Wycombe Road (just N of High Wycombe - off M40). The meeting will be held on the Saturday, and will cover the planning of scythe activities over the coming year. The threat of excessively stringent safety regulations will be one matter for discussion; since October the HSE has been charging the cost of investigation to those being investigated for breaches of the Act at £124 + VAT per hour, whereas previously the HSE footed the bill. We will also be looking at the performance of one of the new peening machines (see p. 6).

The meeting is open to all members of SABI, space permitting. John has promised bread baking with his home-grown wheat on the Sunday. Bring a sleeping bag and mat if you are staying over. If you aren't yet a member and want to join please see details on page 8. If you want to come or want more information, please contact:

Beth Tilston bethtilston@googlemail.com

Dates For Your New Diary

West Country Scythe Fair Sunday 9 June. There will be a teachers and team leaders training course on 6 and 7 June and a beginners' course on the 8 June.

Trim Hay Festival, Co Meath Ireland Scythe competition on Sunday 16 June. For more information see <http://www.trimhaymakingfestival.com/index.html>

Eastern Counties Scythe Festival and Competition DATE CHANGED to 29-30 June, Wimpole Cambs. Contact Simon Damant at Simon.Damant@nationaltrust.org.uk

Haytime Northern Scythe Gathering 26-28 July contact. Teesdale, Rebecca Barrett at the AONB Staff Unit on 01388 528801 (rebecca@northpenninesaonb.org.uk) or visit www.northpennines.org.uk.

Cumbria There will be an event at Brantwood House, Coniston, but the date is not fixed yet.

Romania The next Transylvania haymaking festival: 11-17 August; contact barbara.knowles@yahoo.co.uk

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Courses in 2013

Not all teachers have arranged all their courses but so far we have these lined up:

Clive Leeke, Herts

Introduction to Scything 20th July
2013 The Earth Trust, Wittenham, S Oxon

Introduction to Scything 16th August
2013 Daylesford Organic Farm School,
Daylesford nr Kingham, Gloucestershire,
GL56 0YG

For booking information, please go to my web-
site: www.austrianscythes.co.uk

Beth Tilston, Brighton

Scything for Gardeners (Beginners
course) - 25 May, Staplefield, West Sussex

Scything for Beginners - Saturday 6 July,
Braziers Park, Oxfordshire

Scything for Beginners - Saturday 13
July, Assington Mill, Suffolk

Scything for Gardeners (Beginners
course) 20 July, Staplefield, W. Sussex

Scything for Beginners - Saturday 25 May
2013, Plumpton Green, East Sussex

For more details and to book please go to www.learnscything.com/courses or phone 07818474712

3-4 August Beginners' course with Simon
Fairlie and Stefan Gehrels, Brighton.

www.brightonpermaculture.org.uk/courses-conferences-and-events/courses/scything.html

Simon Fairlie, Dorset/Devon

Three courses at Monkton Wyld
4 May, One day beginner's course.

19-21 July Two day course for beginners
and improvers (Beginners can do only day
1 if they wish, improvers only day 2 if
they wish).

6-8 September Two day course as above.

3-4 August Course in Brighton, see above
under Beth Tilston.

More info see www.thescytheshop.co.uk/courses.html To book phone 01297 560342 or go to www.monktonwyldcourt.co.uk/

Alastair Inglis, Devon/Salop

Acton Scott, Shropshire Sat 3rd May -
Introduction to Scything; 4 May Peening
Booking www.actonscott.com/courses

Sat 11th May - Beginner's course, Hill-
town Organics, Okehampton. Bookings:
Martin Godfrey on 07891-530561.

Sat 25th May - Beginner's course, Hawk-
wood College, Stroud. Bookings: www.hawkwoodcollege.co.uk/courses

August (Date TBC) - Scything workshop
in Norway as part of Woodsmith's Scan-
dinavian Handcraft Holidays. See www.woodsmithstore.co.uk

Exeter Community Agriculture field at
Shillingford St. George: "Getting Ready
for the New Scythe Season", Begin-
ners courses, Peening and Repair Work-
shops, Haymaking Days, and a Wheat
Mowing Session. No dates yet, contact
Alastair on 07796-805453, or email-
ing al.inglis@yahoo.co.uk Facebook
page at www.facebook.com/ruralskills.
scythingsouthwest?ref=hl

Mark Allery, West Sussex

Weald and Downland Museum, beginners'
course, May 17. 01243 811464 courses@wealddown.co.uk

Transition Guildford. One day courses
for beginners and improvers in June and
September. Contact John Bannister johnbannister@virgin.net 01483 570468.

Steve Tomlin, Cumbria

Learn to mow with an Austrian Scythe
19 May, 28 June Improvers and peening
courses to be arranged.

visit <http://scytherspace.wordpress.com> for
more info

Advanced Course

Including Teaching and Team Leading

On 6 and 7 June at the West Country
Scythe Fair, Somerset, with Christiane
Lechner, Phil Batten and Steve Tomlin
Contact Simon at 01297 561359; chap-
ter7@tl.io.org.uk

West Country Scythe Fair

Beginners and improvers course, 8
June, at the West Country Scythe Fair,
Somerset. Contact Simon at 01297 561359;
chapter7@tl.io.org.uk

Other teachers

Tutors we haven't got dates for yet:

Phil Batten (Pembroke)

scythecymru@yahoo.co.uk,

Andrea Gilpin (Welsh Borders)

info@cfga.fsnet.co.uk

Richard Brown (Norfolk)

lovellshall@talk21.com

Chris Riley (Wilts)

chris@pratensis.net

Milos Stankovic (Devon/Cornwall)

ms@hiddenforces.eu

Wwoofer Wanted for Haymaking Season

I have a vacancy for someone wanting
to learn about haymaking, dairy work,
cheesemaking and general small farm
maintenance, for about 10 weeks, from
the end of May to the beginning of Au-
gust. Also helping with the West Country
Scythe Festival. Board, lodging, a free
scythe and some pocket-money provided.

For more info, contact Simon at 01297
561359; chapter7@tl.io.org.uk

Scythe Training in Nepal



At the invitation of the Himalayan Permacul-
ture Centre, Alex Vido went out to Nepal last year
to demonstrate the scythe to peasant farmers. Wheat
and other grains are still harvested by sickle in the
mountains, but motorized reapers, — basically brush-
cutters with a cradle, are now being introduced. —
even though the local farmers have yet to discover the
scythe.

The photo shows a scythe and the motorized
reaper being compared at a stand of the Nepali
Agricultural Research Council. The council's officers
couldn't believe that the scythe is an ancient technol-
ogy — "How come we haven't heard of it till now?"

The trip was very successful and Alex managed
to get the local blacksmith to forge Nepal's first ever
home-produced scythe. Alex and Ashley Vido are
planning to return in 2013 and train up 12 to 18 local
farmers, and provide them with a scythe, so that they
can teach others.

If you wish to find out more, or contribute to funding this venture go to
<http://www.scytheworks.com/SPIN.html>

Scythe Festivals in 2012

West Country Scythe Fair

The eighth West Country Scythe Fair at Langport Somerset on 17 June was a great success this year (after the wash out in 2011) with around 3000 people attending and a lavish assortment of stalls, musical performances and other distractions. Once again Simon Damant won the 5m x 5m championship, and also triumphed in the 10 by 10, with George Montague and Ded Kalaj vying for second and third positions in both events. Andi Ricard won the Ladies event and Chris Riley the Quality Cup.

But the rising star of the show was 12 year old Mikey Hastings, who completed his 2.5 x 5 metre plot in 7.01 minutes with a quality score of 9 (equal with Chris Riley). He is pictured on the right peening with Beth Tilston, runner up in the Ladies competition. Mikey is also an ace mole-catcher, so if any of you have a pest problem . . .

Date for 2013: 9 June.

Eastern Counties

While the West Country Fair is by far the biggest public event, The Eastern Counties Championship, held in 2012 on 24 June, offers more challenges for the serious competitive mower, since the sward at Wimpole is better behaved and more uniform than the rank West Country meadows. As well as the 5x5 metre competition (won for the second year running by Ded Kalaj who does better on this kind of grass) there are "marathons" of quarter of an acre and eighth of an acre. **Date for 2013: 29-30 June.**

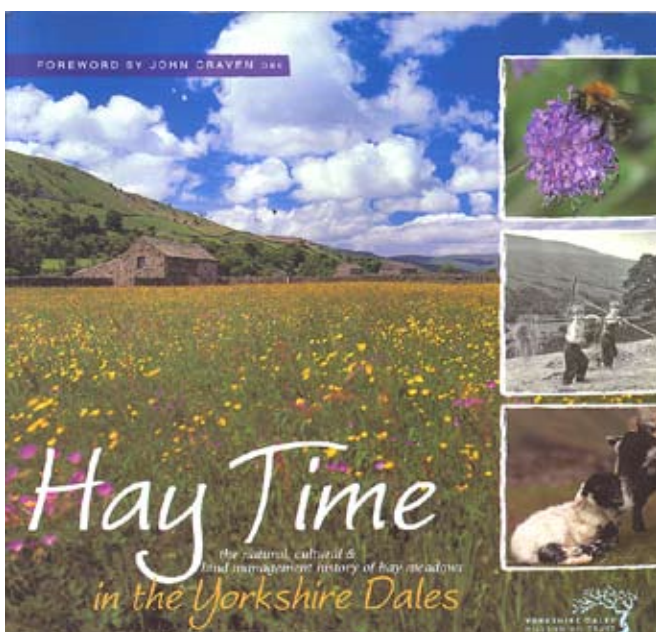


Hay Time in the Pennines

The first Northern Open Scything Competition was held in Teesdale at the end of July as part of the Hay Time project run by the North Pennines AONB. In a beautiful wildflower meadow at Low Way Farm, Holwick, Christiane Lechner and Steve Tomlin provided tuition on the first day and on the following day seven of the new trainees competed in sprint events along with five other mowers. The overall winner was Richard Brown, from Norfolk, with local mowers Neil Clowes and Don Gamble close behind. Susan Jones won the Ladies Competition and the Quality Award went to Mary Wilkinson.

Neil Diment, who ran the event, said: "I think everyone felt the two days had been a resounding success, and it is hoped this event will mark the start of a series of such events in the future." Next year's event is already pencilled in for **26-28 July**.

The Hay Time project was launched in 2006 to conserve and enhance the upland hay meadows of the North Pennines. For more information please contact Rebecca Barrett at the AONB Staff Unit on 01388 528801 (rebecca@northpenninesaonb.org.uk) or visit www.northpennines.org.uk.



Don Gamble, who came third in the Northern Scything competition is also co-editor with Tanya St Pierre of and co-author of *Hay-Time in the Yorkshire Dales*. This wonderful compendium of information includes everything from historical photos and reminiscences, to in depth analysis of the botany and grassland ecosystem of the region. Available from www.thescytheshop.co.uk

NEWS FROM IRELAND

Trim Haymaking Festival

On June 17 a group of us went to the Trim haymaking festival in County Meath, where they have a scythe cutting competition. It has been running for about 15 years and this was the first year the Austrian scythe made an appearance — to a mixed reception. The competition rules are as follows:

- The plot to be mown is 16ft/4.9m by 30ft/9.8m.
- You start cutting in the bottom left corner, meaning you are cutting up a slight gradient.
- You have to cut 4 swathes.
- Once you go over 7 minutes you start receiving penalties.
- However, most emphasis is on quality.

There were 13 competitors, 3 of us had Austrian scythes, all the rest had traditional Irish/English scythes. The main judge is a past winner of the event on 8 different occasions, and is a man set in his ways and he had no time for the Austrian scythe. When judging he measured each swath- which had to be 4ft wide, turned every row looking for uncut blades of grass and the speed was of little importance. Dennis Shannon, Austrian scythe, had the joint fastest time but did not place in the top four. The eventual winner used a measuring stick while cutting to ensure his rows were exactly 4ft.

A lot of the competitors were taken aback by the Austrian scythe, most gave it a go and were impressed by the lightness but said they couldn't cut standing up straight! The winner is 73 years old and has won the competition 3 years in a row. Dennis cut his plot in 4.54 minutes, the winner in 6.20 minutes. There was only 3 seconds difference in the top 4 finishers. Chris Hayes



This year the event in Trim, which is always on the third Sunday of June, coincided with the West Country Festival, so Chris and his Irish colleagues couldn't make it over here. Next year, and for the foreseeable future, the West Country Festival will be on the second weekend in June (while the Eastern Counties festival this year is on the fifth weekend).

SABI Event in Co Wexford

On the 4th of August Dennis Shannon hosted a haymaking day at his farm in Cusbrough in Wexford. After one of the wettest summers on record both Dennis and myself were anxiously scanning the skies as the day drew nearer, but the sun came out and a lot of hay was made due to the dedicated students who listened and practiced as I gave instruction in the use of the Austrian scythe.

We were cutting in a one acre orchard on Dennis' farm, and we put up several hay racks that we first saw a few years ago in Westmeath when Simon Fairlie gave a mowing class there. Some of the people who turned up had used scythes before, but all were suitably impressed by the Austrian scythe and, inspired by ice cream and home brew, got a lot of hay up on the racks.

It was the first event in Ireland run under the banner of the Scythe Association of Britain and Ireland, and we are looking forward to many more!

CH





Mowing Churchyards

In towns, cities and country parishes, across England and Wales, there are churchyards, cemeteries or burial sites, both ancient and modern. Many have remained fairly undisturbed for centuries, allowing plants and animals to flourish alongside the historic monuments and memorials, creating 'living sanctuaries' within the heart of our communities. It is estimated that there are up to 20,000 burial grounds across England and Wales ranging from a quarter of an acre for a small parish church or chapel to up to 45 acres for a large cemetery.

Many of the ancient sites harbour a vast array of wildflowers and grasses and with the right management can become jewels in our landscape once again. This means leaving grass to grow, cutting it at the right time and, most importantly, raking it off to decrease the fertility of the grassland.

Scything is by far the best way to mow these areas which don't lend themselves to large machinery. Strimmers often smother the lichen covered headstones with grass which, if not removed, will kill the lichen colonies - many of which have taken 100's of years to grow and are part of our cultural (medicine, dyes) and natural heritage.

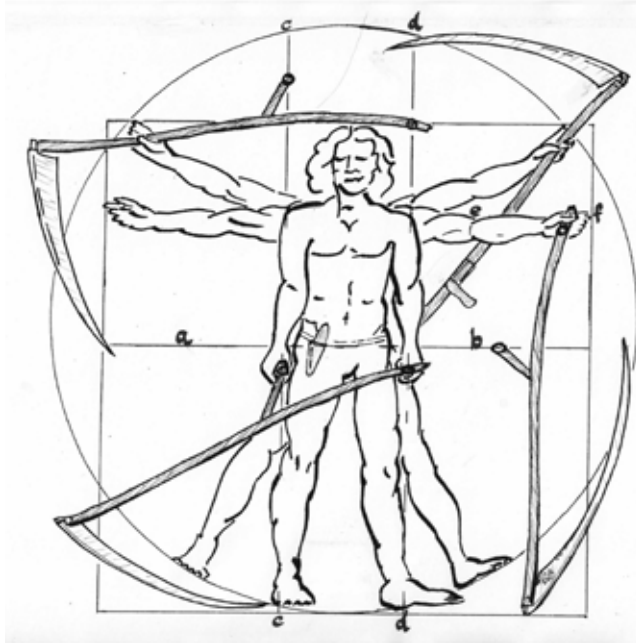
We have seen a massive increase in the demand for scything and scythe training over the past 9 years as managers increasingly reject the strimmer for the scythe. We are working towards the day when seeds from these ancient (and often originally pagan) sites are used to re-establish wild meadows in the wider landscape. This is happening in some sites now – but we want this to be the norm, not the exception.

By Andrea Gilpin of Caring for God's Acre (CFGa): see www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk or on facebook where there are photo albums of our scything days.



Caring for God's Acre sell hay from churchyards which they bale in this home made baler

Snathanatomy



This archetypal design, borrowed from da Vinci, was created by Richard Brown and serves to illustrate his tables showing what snath setting is most suitable for people of various heights. A draft of these tables is currently circulating on the SABI members email list.

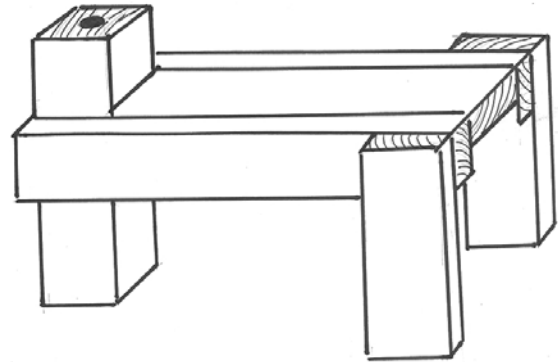
There is also some discussion about snath sizes at scytheassociation.org/2012/02/06/the-human-body-and-scythe-in-proportion/ and scythespace.wordpress.com/2012/12/17/buying-the-right-size-scythe/

Peening Ponies

For years I fumbled around with wobbly logs, until finally, thanks to the sobering influence of Phil Batten, I found time to make myself some peening ponies. A couple of people have requested a design. Here's the simplest recipe I have found, requiring a 98 inch length of 4 by 2, and an 18 inch length of 4 by 4.

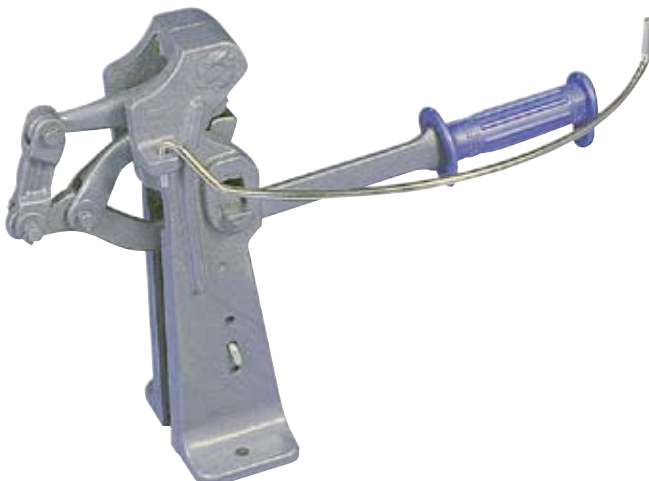
- One upright 4in x 4 in x 18 in
- One seat, 4in x 2 in x 20 in
- Two side braces 4in x 2in x 24 in
- Two back legs 4in x 2in x 15 in

Nail them together with 4 inch nails — except you might want to screw in the front upright in case it splits and you need to replace it. A 12mm drill hole is fine for the jig and the Fux table anvil, but the Picard anvil (whose spike looks as though it was designed for splitting wood) requires more like an 18mm hole. SF



New Peening Machine

Simon Fairlie writes: I have a few samples of a German machine called the Union Dengelapparat, though I call it the Dalek. It consists of a pair of jaws which are sprung open, but which close on the blade and squeeze it when the lever is pressed down. You move the blade along a few millimetres at a time. It squeezes the edge quite thin (enough to flex



the blade with your thumb) but you can set the machine to different degrees of fineness. It requires a fair amount of pressure on the lever to squeeze, possibly two hands for kids, girls and oldies.

My initial impressions of this machine are:

- (i) It can probably do a better job than the jig.
- (ii) It requires less skill than free-hand peening, but you still have to take care that the blade is inserted into the jaws at a regular angle.
- (iii) It is perhaps a bit quicker than freehand peening but not a lot.
- (iv) It is quicker than peening with the jig, and less boring.
- (v) It is more than twice as expensive as any other option.

My tentative conclusion is that there is one situation where this machine might prove useful. That is in the workshop of a professional or voluntary organization where one person who knows how to peen is overburdened with preparing blades for a large number of staff or volunteers. This is a tool whose use could be delegated, with a relatively small amount of training, to other people.

I would like to test this. I have one of these machines available on trial loan to any professional who finds themselves overburdened with peening for a team of volunteers or staff. If you wish to borrow it, sale or return, please contact me at chapter7@tlio.org.uk 01297 561359.

Anna Karenina



When researchers for Joe Wright's film of Tolstoy's novel came to the West Country Scythe Festival in June 2011, they had no difficulty in recruiting 40 competent mowers to re-enact the famous scene where Levin, the wealthy but awkward hero of the novel, picks up a scythe and joins his peasant labourers. Two months later, a sprawling encampment of marquees and Winnebagos appeared overnight at a Ministry of Defence location on Salisbury Plain, and was soon bustling with scythesmen, make-up personnel, camera technicians, continuity advisors, caterers and all the other camp-followers associated with a Hollywood-scale shoot.

After a day and a half of preparation, 40 bearded mowers spread out in formation across the valley, while behind them peasant lasses in aprons and headscarfs tossed the mown grass in the air. Facing them stood Joe Wright, beating time and chanting "left right" as an orchestra of scythe blades, swinging in unison, advanced through the grass, followed by cameramen on a railway track installed for the purpose. It was a fine sight, marred only by the transparent inauthenticity of the beards, and it was probably the largest gang of mowers England has seen for many a year.

We knew, of course, that most of the footage from this re-enactment would end up on the cutting-room floor. Nevertheless it was a disappointment, when the film appeared in September, to see the labours of over 100 people for three days and an expense bill that could well have approached seven figures distilled into barely 12 seconds of mowing — 12 seconds which are a pro rata reflection of the skewed focus of the entire film.

Several critics complained that Wright marginalized the "Levin subplot". But the relationship between Levin, his wife Kitty and the people on his estate is no subplot: it is the moral, intellectual and narrative backbone of the book. Anna Karenina begins with Levin and Kitty, ends with them, and considerably more chapters are devoted to their story than to Anna's. That the novel is entitled Anna Karenina is fortunate for film directors who might wish to cast a Greta Garbo, a Vivien Leigh or a Keira Knightley in the title role, and no doubt naming a novel after its tragic heroine helped to increase sales in 19th century Russia. But Anna and her lover Vronsky are the sub-plot, there to highlight the hollowness of Moscow society, and once the unfortunate but increas-

ingly tiresome woman has thrown herself under a train, she is soon forgotten.

As a sequel to *War and Peace*, Tolstoy's great novel should have been called *Town and Country*, because that it is what it is about. Moscow is depicted as a "stagnant pool", hosting an interminable cycle of receptions, concerts and balls patronized by an elite living on bureaucratic sinecures, whose tedium is enlivened only by Anna's disgrace. Levin prefers the countryside where he is preoccupied with the challenge of managing his estate and understanding the great mystery that perplexes him: Who are the millions of peasants that produce the wealth that these parasites consume? How can they be persuaded to take on agricultural improvements? How do they think? In what do they believe? And why don't they rise in revolution? Levin, a landowning aristocrat like Tolstoy, never really understands how they tick, because he doesn't know how to talk to them. The mowing scene in Anna Karenina is the nearest he ever gets in the book to communicating with them.

When I got up to the shoot on Salisbury Plain, some of the mowers there were saying that Wright wanted to highlight the scythe sequence, and I thought gosh! maybe he is going to give a voice to the other Russia that Tolstoy tantalizingly alludes to. I should have realized that he was unlikely to do anything of the sort. Film directors on the scale of Joe Wright are similar to the aristocrats he delights in portraying. With inordinate sums of money at their disposal, they mobilize gangs of labourers to create goods which, at the end of the day, on a whim, they decide they don't like and discard.

I once worked for a fellow like that who had a 17 million pound mansion near Salisbury. He commissioned three rooms worth of hand-made oak panelling and when it was built, he didn't like it so he scrapped it. Then he did the same with a plaster moulded ceiling. It was an insult to the craftsmen who created them, just as the 12 seconds of footage is an insult to the 50 or so people who came to mow and to the countless labourers who produced all the wine, dinners and frocks that the Moscow gentry enjoyed. Joe Wright's marginalization of the scythe sequence is a mirror image of the marginalization of the peasantry in Russia, and throughout history.

SF



The SCYTHE ASSOCIATION of BRITAIN and IRELAND

THE SCYTHE ASSOCIATION OF BRITAIN & IRELAND

was formed in 2011, only 2000 years after the arrival of the scythe in the British Isles . . .

These islands are blessed with one of the best grass-growing climates in the world, so grassland management has always been a necessary activity, whether for feeding livestock through the winter by haymaking, or for keeping on top of lawns, cricket pitches and wayside weeds.

In the past workers were trained in the proper handling of the English scythe, but after WW2 scythes were replaced by noisy and temperamental petrol-powered machinery. In the last decade the Austrian scythe has arrived in the UK. A traditional yet modern and versatile tool, it is light and easy to use, yet giving scope for ever-improving levels of skill and pleasure.

Scythes are once again being used in public parks and gardens, wildlife reserves, stately homes and allotments, on riverbanks and haymeadows throughout the islands. From the Home Counties to the Outer Hebrides, the scything revival is flourishing, not least because of its benefits to health, its environmental benefits, and the sense of satisfaction that comes from real work done well.

As a testament to the scythe's many enjoyable aspects, a lively social network has sprung up with events, festivals and courses around the country and keen participants from all walks and ages of life. It is this natural association which SABI exists to support and foster.

Reminder to Members: your membership lapses on the 31 January, so please renew by sending a cheque to HQ at Monkton Wyld. Thank you.

The Aims of The Scythe Association:

- To promote the use of scythes in 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



Membership benefits include:

- Free or reduced entry fees to competitions
- Personal invitation to regional events
- Local and national networking and training opportunities
- Downloadable leaflets
- Googlegroup news and blog access.
- A membership card and handsome die-cast badge.

Membership is open to all, and runs annually from the 1st February. Irish members may pay by cheque or cash, in euros.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

Name

Address:

Town

County / Postcode

email address

How would you prefer to keep in touch with the Association? (tick as many as you wish to)

- website news postings
- Windrow newsletter (sent as pdf by email)
- facebook / twitter
- gmail group
- by post

Do you belong to any organisations or companies relevant to your use of scythes?

Signature:

Date

I enclose a cheque or postal order made out to the Scythe Association for £10 for annual subscription to next 31st January (Irish members - 10 euro)

Please return to Membership Sec, Monkton Wyld Court, Charmouth, Bridport DT6 6DQ.