

The Windrow

Newsletter of The Scythe Association of Britain and Ireland

No 6 May 2013



SUMMER AT LAST

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Festival Season

Eastern Counties Scything Weekend

**Saturday 29 and Sunday 30 June,
Wimpole Hall, Cambs. (National Trust)**

The scythe gathering where the UK's top mowers compete on quarter acre plots. For lesser mortals it is a day out, to learn about scything and managing meadows with expert advice from Simon Damant (National Trust and current UK champion mower) and Richard Brown (Emorsgate Seeds) and others.

The weekend also includes practical rural craft demonstrations: pole lathers, blacksmiths, hurdle makers, wood carver, furniture maker, various green woodworking and sheep shearing. It culminates with the 5th Eastern Counties Scything Competition on Sunday afternoon (open to all abilities except Simon Damant): 5m by 5m and 10m by 10m.

On Saturday 29 there is a beginner's scythe course with Richard Brown and one-to-one scythe lessons with Gemma Suggitt. (see p.3)

For more information see www.wimpole.org or contact simon.damant@gmail.com

HAYMAKING

Monkton Wyld Dorset

Mowers and tedders welcome to help with haymaking at Monkton Wyld, Dorset. Serious graft, lubricated with beer, cider, food, song and accommodation, all provided. Hopefully in June, but weather and grass growth dependent: if you want to be on the list to be alerted when it's happening, email Simon:

chapter7@tlio.org.uk or ring 01297 561359

Hand Haymaking Day

Scythe Cymru, Carmarthenshire

With Phil and Michelle Batten Sunday 21st July. Join us for our annual social mow on the wildflower meadows of Dyfed Permaculture Farm Trust. Meet fellow scythers, share mowing tips and tricks, learn about hand hay making techniques and building hay racks followed by a bring and share lunch. We will be mowing from 8am, join us when you can. Bring food to share. Overnight camping available. Volunteers welcome for the weekend and following week.

www.scythecymru.wordpress.com scythecymru@yahoo.co.uk tel: 07813464990.

Haytime Northern Scythe Gathering

26-28 July Teesdale, Holwick
near Barnard Castle contact is
Neil Diment neil@ndiment.co.uk

Trim Hay Festival

Trim, Co Meath Ireland

Scythe competition on Sunday
16 June.

For more information see <http://www.trimhaymakingfestival.com/index.html>

Middle England Scythe Gathering

Barnt Green, N. Worcestershire
22 June (date to be confirmed)

Contact Gemma Suggitt:
gemmasuggitt@yahoo.com

Fifth International Haymaking Festival

Gyimes, Romania 11-18
August

The programme depends on the weather but should include mowing by scythe, making hay, a mowing competition, learning how to make traditional rakes and scythes, visiting the cows in the summer pastures, making and tasting cheese, horse and cart rides, collecting wild herbs, enjoying local food, learning about meadow plants and animals, testing your skill in folk dances.

Barbara Knowles barbara.knowles@yahoo.co.uk; <https://sites.google.com/site/barbaraknowlesproject/haymeadow-biodiversity/hay-making-festival>

Green Scythe Fair

**Langport, Somerset,
Sunday 9 June**

The UK's biggest Scythe Fair, over 2500 people attended last year. As well as the scythe competition and other scythe and haymaking events there are over 70 stalls, a craft area, a kids area, two music stages, a speakers' forum and various other side-shows and oddballs.

The competition involves heats from 11am (anyone can enter – mow as much as you can in a minute). At 3pm the top 24 mowers will compete in the final. There will also be team mowing and other events.

SABI's AGM will be held at 7.30 on the evening of Saturday 8 June.

There will be a teachers' and team leaders' training course on 6 and 7 June and a beginners' course on the 8 June held on the same site (see next page).

Held at Thorney Lakes, Muchelney, Langport, Somerset. For information see www.greenfair.org.uk/ www.thescytheshop.co.uk/festival.html or phone 01297 561359.

N American Maritime Championships

Dirk van Loon writes:

We are holding our tenth annual Maritime Hand Mowing Championships August 24,25 at the Ross Farm Heritage Museum in New Ross, Nova Scotia. The event is sponsored by Rural Delivery, a country magazine founded in 1976. Possibly Kai and Ashley Vido will attend. There will be mowers from Vermont, Nova Scotia, and other Maritime provinces, and we invite mowers from the UK who may have been planning a vacation here "some day." (<http://museum.gov.ns.ca/rfm/en/home/default.aspx>) A little more than an hour from New Ross we have cabins and a cookhouse on the shore, the Harrison Lewis Centre, where visitors may stay.

(www.HarrisonLewisCentre.org.)

COURSES

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/Norway

Scything for Gardeners (Beginners
course) - Saturday 25th May 2013, Staple-
field, West Sussex

Scything for Beginners - Saturday 22nd
June 2013, Plumpton Green, East Sussex

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

Scything for Gardeners (Beginners
course) - Saturday 20th July 2013, Staple-
field, West Sussex

Scything for Beginners - Saturday 27th
July 2013, Plumpton Green, East Sussex

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

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

19-21 July Monkton Wyld Dorset, 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.

24 August One day course at Gressenhall,
Norfolk

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

Alastair Inglis, Devon/Cornwall/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

Exeter Community Agriculture field at
Shillingford St. George: "Getting Ready
for the New Scythe Season", Beginners
courses, Peening and Repair Workshops,
Haymaking Days, and a Wheat Mowing Ses-
sion. Also a course in Cornwall

No dates yet, contact Alastair on 07796-
805453, or emailing al.inglis@yahoo.co.uk
Facebook page at www.facebook.com/ruralskills.scythingsouthwest?ref=hl

Courses at the West Country Scythe Fair

Combine scythe tuition with a weekend at Britain's
most popular scythe event

ADVANCED COURSE

ESPECIALLY SUITABLE FOR TEAM LEADERS AND TEACHERS

At the West Country Scythe Fair four of the best scythe teachers in Britain join forces to offer what is undoubtedly the top scythe course available for anyone who wishes to master the skill, and particularly for people who have to teach mowing or lead teams of volunteers. On Thursday 6 and Friday 7 June we guide you through everything you need to know about scythe use, including maintenance, set up, mowing techniques, sharpening, and peening – covering not only how to improve your own performance, but also how best to explain good practice to novices. The course also covers matters such as organizing mowing events and teams of volunteers, dealing with mown grass, insurance and health and safety issues. On Saturday 8 you will teach novices in the morning, and in the afternoon there is a choice of workshops, including peening with Phil Batten, hay-making, grassland management, cereal mowing etc. The tutors are Christiane Lechner from Austria, Steve Tomlin from Cumbria, Phil Batten from Pembrokeshire and Simon Fairlie from Dorset. The cost of the course is £165 or £190 for organizations, including lunch on Thursday and Friday and entry to the Scythe Fair on Sunday.

BEGINNERS' AND IMPROVERS' COURSE

On Saturday 8, the day before the Scythe Fair, learn the basics of mowing, or improve your skills under the tutelage of Christiane Lechner, Steve Tomlin and Phil Batten. Scythe maintenance, set up, sharpening and mowing are all covered in the morning. In the afternoon there is a choice of workshops including peening with Phil and Steve, grassland management, haymaking and cereal mowing. Food and a bar available on site.

Cost £55 including entry for the Scythe Fair on Sunday

To register or for more information, please contact Simon Fairlie: chapter7@tlio.org.
uk ; 01297561359.

Mark Allery, West Sussex

Weald and Downland Museum, beginners' course, 17 May and 10 September; 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.

Richard Brown, Norfolk

Scything for Beginners and improvers at the Eastern Counties Scythe and Smallholder Weekend, Wimpole, 29 June

Flora Locale course at Emorsgate Seeds, Kings Lynn, 3 July.

For Norfolk, also Simon Fairlie's course at Gressenhall, 24 August

loveallshall@talk21.com; <http://wildseed.co.uk/articles/2013/02/01/meadow-management-scythe-training-2013>

Phil Batten, Carmarthenshire

Introductory Scythe Courses:
Sat 25th May), Sun 23rd June, Wed 17th July, Sun 18th August, Sat 14th September

Improvers Course: Sun 15th Sept
Peening and Sharpening Workshop: Tue 6th August

Social Mow and Hand Haymaking Day:
July, date to be confirmed

For more information visit www.scythecymru.wordpress.com email: scythecymru@yahoo.co.uk. tel: 07813464990.

Gemma Suggitt, Worcs

One-to-one scythe lessons at the Eastern Counties Scythe and Smallholder Weekend, Wimpole 29 June

Available for teaching scythe courses, groups and individuals, Worcestershire based but will travel.
gemmausuggitt@yahoo.com

Andrea Gilpin, Welsh Borders

Scything for beginners - Saturday 18th May, 10-5, Karuna, Picklescott, Shropshire. Book via merav66@hotmail.com 01694 751374.

Scything for beginners - Tuesday 11th June, 10-3, St Weonards Churchyard, Herefordshire. Book via andrea@cfga.org.uk, 01588 673041.

Contact Andrea 01588 673041

Steve Tomlin, Cumbria

Learn to Mow. Kendal 19 May, 28 June, 7 Sept £60

Improve your Peening, £60 Kendal 8 Sept
<http://scythespace.wordpress.com/>

Courses at Brantwood House:

2 day course: 29 30 June; Improvers 17 July, Peening 18 July, Haymaking 20, 21 July.

<http://www.brantwood.org.uk/courses.htm>

Chris Riley (Bristol)

Available for courses: chris@pratensis.net

Wwoofers Wanted for Haymaking Season

I have a vacancy for people wanting to learn about haymaking, dairy work, cheese-making and general small farm maintenance, for about 10 weeks, from the end of May to the beginning of August. 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@tlio.org

The Return of the Native

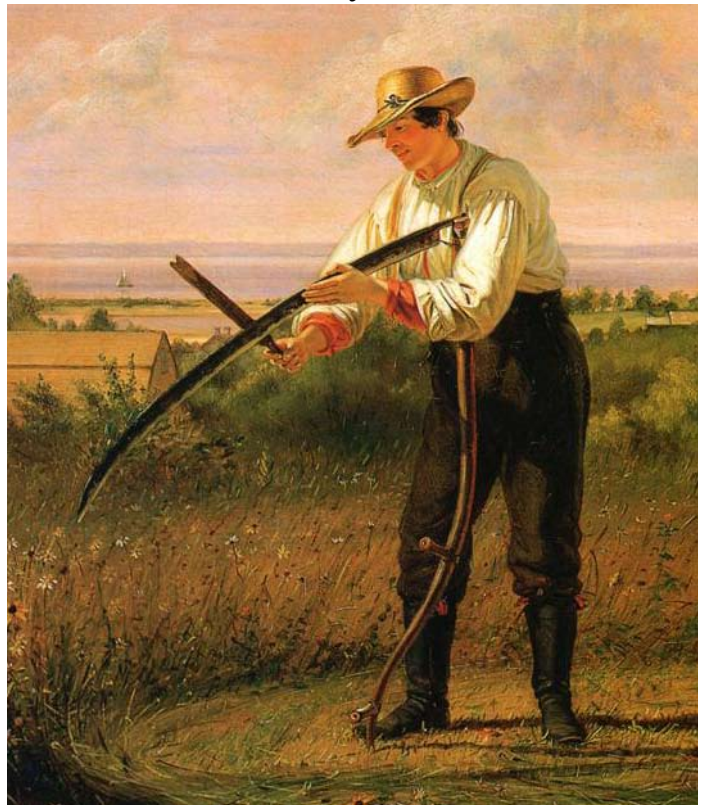
Over the last 25 years the traditional Anglo-American scythe, once the only kind available in the USA and the British Isles, has become semi-obsolete. Thanks to enthusiastic promotion by the likes of David Tresemer and Peter Vido, thousands of mowers have found that the continental style of blade is lighter, easier to sharpen, and easier to handle. Traditional blades have not been made in the UK since Tyzack ceased production round about 1987, and Seymour is the only company still manufacturing them in the US.

It was nonetheless inevitable that sooner or later aficionados of the Anglo American scythe should rally to its support and remind us that it is a fine and serviceable tool which served to mow all the grass and much of the grain across a large swath of the globe for several centuries. Benjamin P Bouchard, owner of the Baryonyx knife company writes that he is “working to fight the misunderstanding revolving around the tool that has been promulgated by so many Austrian/Continental scythe enthusiasts.”

Bouchard has circulated the draft of a “Primer on the Selection, Use and Maintenance of the American Scythe” that he is writing for the Seymour company. It contains useful information on the terminology, the set up, and the sharpening of Anglo American scythes. Much of this is the same as for the continental scythe, but the setting of the nibs (handgrips) which can revolve around the snath is different, and so is the need to adjust the tang angle by heating and bending it.

The most interesting section however is his description of the mowing action:

While the European scythe is operated primarily from the coil spring-like sweeping rotation of the user's trunk, the American scythe employs a pendulous pivoting action, primarily supplied by the shoulder



W S Mount

and arms. The lower nib acts as a pivoting point and the curvature of the snath is to provide greater travel for the left hand as it operates the motion . . .

The motion of the American scythe is most easily described as being somewhat similar to the operation of the oar on a rowing boat with the rowlock being the lower nib. The approach to the cut is “opened” as the right foot steps forward and the majority of one's weight placed over it. The arms open towards the target with the left arm travelling furthest, and the point is brought to bear on the start of the swath, with the heel of the blade very slightly raised. Upon the full opening of the swing . . . the weight of the body is shifted left in an almost falling motion as the left foot is extended forward and the cut closed with a pulling action primarily accentuated by the left hand . . . Most of the work is done by the momentum generated by the shifting of balance and the pendulum action of the scythe. When the motion of the body and the forces acting on the scythe are properly in balance, the only force necessary beyond the natural action of gravity is the minimal effort required to keep the action in motion and to support the scythe itself.

Bouchard's observations support the theory that the English blades were heavier in order to gain the momentum to travel through thick heavy grass. Another theory is that because they required less forging and more grinding than continental blades, they were easier to manufacture in Sheffield's large industrialized factories, particularly the patent blade which by the 1970s was the only kind still being manufactured in the UK.

Whatever the case we have yet to see any contemporary mower performing anywhere near as well with the traditional scythe as they do with the Austrian model, but this is probably because nobody knows how. For those interested, the scythe teacher who currently performs best with the traditional English scythe is Mark Allery (see listing p. 3).



Media Matters

The scythe has been making quite a name for itself recently popping up in all sorts of contexts. Ade Edmondson visited Simon and Gill's scythe store in the pouring rain in his *Ade in Britain* TV programme; Radio Wales broadcast a programme on Caring for God's Acre which included their scythe work in churchyards; Mark Thomas' was gob-smacked to find that Dorset yokels still use scythes when his *Manifesto* programme came to Bridport; Monty Don listed the Austrian scythe as number three in his top ten of garden tools; Marcel Theroux, a keen scythesman, apparently has a passage on scythes in his latest novel *Strange Bodies*, though I haven't got to it yet; and Emma Must's poem *Notes on the Use of the Austrian Scythe* won second prize in the Strokestown Poetry Competition, in Ireland (see right).

However the film industry still doesn't seem to be able to get it's head round authentic mowing. Jim McVitie had this to say about the scything in *The Village*, screened by BBC One on Sunday nights:

"While the scything scene in Episode One was more extensive than that in the Anna Karenina film and it was good to see an English scythe featured, the technique was rather poor and they had failed to attach a bow before mowing wheat. Also, the crop was over-ripe for scything and, given that the programme was set in 1914, it was disappointing to see that it was of a post 1980 semi-dwarf variety."

Meanwhile, although SABI has asked for footage of the *Anna Karenina* shoot, nothing has been forthcoming, despite Director Joe Wright's enthusiasm for the "scrumpy-drinking West Country scything association". which you can see on Steve Tomlin's blog:

<http://scythespace.wordpress.com/2013/01/25/what-joe-wright-really-thought-of-the-scythes/>

Treasures of Transylvania

Barbara Knowles runs a fund supporting the rural economy in Transylvania, which has long been dependent on scythes and haymaking to support its predominately dairy focussed agriculture. As well as organizing an international haymaking festival (see page 2) she is also helping to promote the following

Mountain Hay Meadows: Hotspots of Biodiversity and Traditional Culture, a film by Ágota Juhász, on DVD.

Traditional hay meadow management in Transylvania created and maintains outstanding biodiversity and landscape, provides healthy food and sustains rural economies and communities. This award-winning film documents a disappearing lifestyle, local knowledge, and the outstanding natural treasures of our region, and describes the contradictions and challenges in European policies aimed at protecting these threatened habitats and the small scale farmers who manage them. Copies available from barbara.knowles@yahoo.co.uk

Seminar report: Europe's hay meadows in decline - what are we losing and what can we do? A test case for EU agriculture and biodiversity policy.

This is a report of a policy seminar at the European Parliament, Brussels, 8 November 2012 discussed how European institutions can protect these treasures and support the farmers who manage them more effectively.

http://mountainhaymeadows.eu/brussels_2012.php

More information from Barbara's website <http://www.treasuresoftransylvania.org/>

Poems Please

Charlotte Fairlie is compiling an anthology of poems about scythes and mowing. There are a surprising number of them. If you know of any not very well known poems on the subject she would be delighted to hear from you — or indeed if you have written a good one yourself. Write to cfair7000@yahoo.com

The following poem by Emma Must won second prize the Strokestown Poetry Competition in Ireland.

Notes on the Use of the Austrian Scythe

You can no more lend a man your scythe
than you can lend him your false teeth,
so take this day as green as harvest suppers,
borrow this meadow where the grass parts like butter,
I'll carry both in to your windowless ward,
heap sheaves of hours beside your bed,
then babble about what I've learnt of mowing:
nibs and tangs and snaths, heels and toes
and edges - esoteric glossaries
for parts of tools grown rusty through disuse;
the sharpening of blades; and principles
of movement, trimming techniques, windrows, spill.
I have a hunch all this might interest you -
who drove us at weekends to run round woods,
who pointed out sea-birds, steam trains, castles -
and knowing your appreciation of the technical,
if I can communicate how vital
it is to keep the hafting angle tight,
and how though the neigung doesn't simply
translate it can be altered with a shim
of plywood, it might transport you for an evening
from your fixed intravenous
existence where time is marked by the sickly
drip, drip, drip of antibiotics
disrupted only by the clatter of supper
sharp at six, the tea-girl's cheery 'Cuppa?
Orange squash? Hot chocolate? Champagne?'
I hesitate to dwell too long on sharpening
the blade . . . I'll paraphrase: with a quality
natural whetstone, never a klumpat,
make one complete pass from beard to point.
That's honing. Then there's peening:
to trick life from the scythe for years to come
tap the edge of the blade with a hammer,
tease it out like pastry . . . But time is getting tight
so what I want to finish on tonight
are those principles of movement: staying true,
the simple shift of weight from foot to foot,
keeping give in the knees and judging the lean,
meditating on how we breathe
so we avoid those unexpected blips,
the woody stumps that send our pulses skittish.
Let's focus now on minimising spill
as late sun curves around the outfield,
concentrate on holding a line,
get satisfaction from a job well done,
hope that we have learnt enough to guide us
through the mass of grass as yet uncut.

Scything and Flora Locale



In *Windrow 4* Simon Fairlie reported on a survey of professional scythe users which highlighted the potentially important role the scythe has for grassland management and habitat management. With this in mind I decided this year to offer a practical scythe course within the Flora Locale programme specifically targeted at this group.

Flora Locale was established in 1998 as an independent charity. Flora Locale works alongside other organisations like BSBI, Plantlife and the Wild life Trusts

to promote and advance the conservation and enhancement of native wild plant populations and flower rich plant communities. Its particular focus is on facilitating the exchange of best practice information in relation to creative conservation and ecological restoration. This has two main components;

- coordinating advice on specifying appropriate seed and plant material (wild flowers, grasses, trees and shrubs) for planting schemes (including where this should be sourced from: hence "Flora Locale")
- fostering best practice in the use of native plants in habitat restoration and enhancement schemes.

To achieve these objectives Flora Locale has produced some very practical and useful technical guidance notes and other information which are freely available through its website.

Flora Locale also organises a comprehensive series of training events each year around the country (now in

16th year). 2013 is the first year in which Scythe training will feature significantly (my course and also a demonstration by Clive Leeke).

The main audience for Flora Locale's work has primarily been professional people who are involved in land and its management, either directly (eg as farmers or landowners) or as advisers (eg local authorities, Environment agency, wildlife trusts, landscape professionals etc). In recent years Flora Locale are experiencing increased demand from voluntary and community groups looking to restore wild plant communities in shared open spaces of village greens, urban parks and other pockets of community open space and gardens.

It is too early to say what the uptake will be, but there have been some encouraging enquires from local authorities who have used Emorsgate's wild flower mixtures in the past. I have also had an enquiry from a local authority looking to develop a new SUDS (sustainable urban drainage systems: managed wetlands that collect run off from roads etc which are created and need managing on a small scale – ideal scythe territory!).

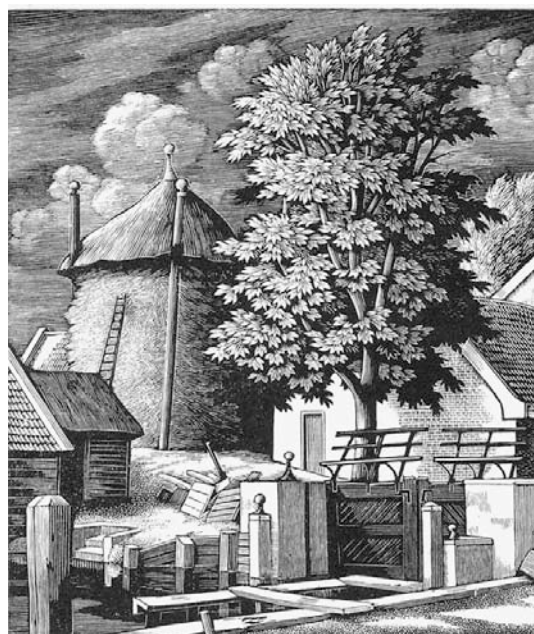
The aim of this Flora Locale practical scything course will be to engage participants in a hands-on way with the sown wild flower meadows around Emorsgate's seed farm in Norfolk. Alongside practical instruction on basic scythe use, I hope to be able to use the scythe as a teaching aid; to give participants a better feel (both literally and metaphorically) for grassland structure and management. Scything also provides the historical context which underpins the understanding of meadow management. The scythe is the essential tool to which ancient flower rich meadows owe their very existence.

More information and course booking can be found on the Flora Locale website.

Richard Brown



Two woodcuts by George Mackley depicting Dutch haybarns with roofs that could be elevated or lowered according to the amount of hay being stored, dated 1964 and 1969. Does anyone know of similar examples in the UK?



SABI NATIONAL ORGANISERS 2013

Here is the current list of the local organisers for SABI activities. You don't need to be a member to get in touch, whether to request help with an outsize mowing job, volunteer assistance, share skills, ideas and problems, or just invite everyone round for a picnic. Connect with your local mowers' network and help to encourage a flourishing society of Scythers in these green and grassy isles.

EAST ANGLIA

Northern ; Richard Brown ; richardjbrown556@gmail.com

Southern: Simon Damant ; simondamant@nationaltrust.org.uk

THE NORTH

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

North-East ; Friends of St Nicholas Fields, York. tom@stnicksfields.org.uk

Scotland ; volunteers wanted

HOME COUNTIES

London ; Ida Fabrizio ; londonscything@gmail.com

Oxford & Bucks ; John Letts ; jbletts@btinternet.com

Greater London, Herts & Berks ; Clive Leeke ; clive@austrianscythes.co.uk

SOUTH EAST

Kent & Sussex ; Beth Tilston ; bethtilston@googlemail.com

Surrey ; John Bannister ; johnwbannister@virgin.net

Hampshire & Wilts ; Mark Allery ; m.allery@virgin.net

SOUTH WEST

Bristol, Glos & North Somerset ; Chris Riley ; chris@pratensis.net

Dorset, Somerset and East Devon ; Alastair Inglis ; al.inglis@yahoo.co.uk

Cornwall & South Devon ; Kevin Austin ; kaustin@edenproject.com

CENTRAL

Midlands ; Gemma Suggitt ; gemmasuggitt@yahoo.com

Mid-Wales & Borders ; Andrea Gilpin ; info@cfiga.fsnet.co.uk

Wales ; Phil Batten ; scythecymru@yahoo.co.uk

IRELAND ; Chris Hayes ; chris@badgershillforestry.ie





Norman Thelwell

Dear SABI Members,

Hearty thanks to all of you who have remembered to renew your sub, and a gentle reminder to those who haven't. In view of the rubbish weather since February (official start of SABI's year) there is an amnesty till the 8th of June, AGM day. (NB - All who have joined since last November are paid up till next February.)

Please post your cheques or well-wrapped tenners/ euros to Gill at SABI HQ, Monkton Wyld Court, Charmouth, Bridport DT6 6DQ.

Thanks!

The Scythe Association's AGM will be held at the Scythe Festival at 7.30 pm on Saturday evening. All members or would be members are welcome.

SCOTLAND AHOY: SABI are still looking for a regional organizer for north of the border. The position is not very onerous.