

The Windrow

Newsletter of The Scything Association of Britain and Ireland

No 12 March 2017



The Faroes, Dúvugarðar, with tidal lagoon beyond.

Windrow No 12 March 2017

CONTENTS

SABI News	2	Fascination in the Faroes	12
Courses; Uk and International	2	Explaining peening to Mr McGregor	15
Equipment News	2	The Scything Handbook by Ian Miller.	
Events; Uk and International	4	A Review Chris Riley	16
Course Directory	8	Welsh Sandstone for Superior Scythe Stones	18
Hay Disposal	10	Summer and Winter Scything in Sussex	21
Blythe's Scythes Over 2,000 in stock	11	A Trip to the Trim Haymaking Festival, Ireland	23
Seventh WInter SABI meeting		22	

SABI NEWS



International Peening Day

International Peening Day this year falls on 2nd April. An 'everywhere-event' — except for people in the Southern Hemisphere — its aims are to remind people to prepare their scythes in advance of the mowing season and provide support by encouraging them to meet and peen together.

Alas by the time you read this International peening day will have passed. I hope that everyone saw the post Richard Brown made to the SABI mailing list and dutifully did their peening and sharpening.

To those whose missed the day because of late publication..My apologies
The Editor

TRAINING COURSES

Meadow Connections: The Northern Scythe Championships

Two day "Learn to scythe course"

Friday 7th - Saturday 8th July
with Steve Tomlin

Lower Winskill Farm, Settle, North Yorks
See page five for details

Dorset Wildlife Trust

Beginners Scything Course
Saturday 22nd July 2017
with Chris Riley

Accommodation and camping available.
Information:- https://www.kingcombe.org/Scything_Workshop-22_Jul_2017.html
Bookings:- <https://www.kingcombe.org/bookhere.html>

Why struggle?

Learn how to get your blades sharp and to scythe expertly with the

Improvers' Masterclass

at the

West Country Scythe Fair

Friday 9th - Saturday 10th June 2017

A course for:-

- Mowers with some experience who want to develop their skills;
- Team leaders managing volunteers or staff;
- People who want to teach scythe use to others.

You will get personal attention from three of the most experienced teachers in the UK: Christiane Laganda, scythe and yoga teacher from Austria; Phil Batten master peener and scythe competition winner from Scythe Cymru and Steve Tomlin author of the definitive scythe manual 'Learn to Scythe'. The cost is £125 for individuals, £150 for organizations, £90 concession for unwaged. Meals are provided. Camping on site is available.

Beginners course

Saturday 10th June

with Kevin Austin, Chris Riley and Andi Ricard. This course covers scythe set-up, mowing and sharpening in the morning; peening, plus workshops on hay making, grassland management and the English scythe in the afternoon.

The cost is £60 per person, including lunch.

The venue for both courses is at Thorney Lakes.

Muchelney, near Langport
<http://www.thorneylakes.co.uk/>

For a programme and other information please see:-
<http://www.thescytheshop.co.uk/festival.html>
To book, email Simon at scythes@myphone.coop or by telephone on 01297 561359

Skyegrove, Herodsfoot, Cornwall

Beginners scything course

27th May and 5th Aug 2017

Improvers scything course

9th September 2017

Course tutor Kevin Austin

Both courses cost £65 and include lunch. Alternatively, if you prefer, we can come to your land to deliver the course for a group of students (6 max) the cost is £200 For further info go to:-
www.skyegrove.co.uk
email kevin@skyegrove.co.uk
or Phone:- Kevin Austin 07943 653825

The 24th Haymaking Festival at Ryghsetra, Buskerud County, Norway

A course in the practical and theoretical management of ecologically important hay meadows, at Ryghsetra, Buskerud County, Norway.

6th - 9th July, 2017

Organised by The Nature Conservation Society, Buskerud County. The course has been running since 1994.

It takes place on the second weekend in July, from Thursday afternoon finishing at 4pm on Sunday.

The course takes place at Ryghsetra, the small farm in the municipality of Nedre Eiker, in Buskerud County. The farm is about 60km west of Oslo. The nearest community is Mjøndalen, the nearest city Drammen.

The wonderful botanically-rich hay meadow at Ryghsetra is characterised by the following:-

No fertilizers are used

No chemicals (pesticides etc.) are used

The soil is left unploughed

Parts of the meadow have a very high biodiversity regarding the plants, fungi and insect life

During the course we will scythe the 3ha meadow, and stack the grass for drying on specially-built wood and wire hay-drying racks.

In addition, you will be invited to:

Learn to recognise the characteristic wildlife species of an ecologically important hay meadow.

Learn more about the traditional management of such important hay meadows.

Learn about the practical use of the scythe: how to put it together, how to sharpen it and keep it sharp, and how to cut the grass.

Participate in discussions and learn from people with practical experience in management of ecologically-important farming landscapes.

The course has become a national and international meeting place for people interested in such 'High Nature Value' grasslands.

Briefly learn about the theoretical and practical management and establishment of pollarded trees.

Gain ideas for yourself on how to organise such courses involving practical work.

Learn much about the history and culture of the Old Norwegian farming landscape.

Walthamstow Marshes Beginners Courses and Scythe Workshops

Saturday 24th June 2017

See page six for details

Monkton Wyld Court Dorset

Two day courses

20th-21st May, 15th-16th July and
16th-17th Sept

Courses content includes scythe use, haymaking and grassland management. B and B on site.

For more info go to:-

www.thescytheshop.co.uk/courses.html

or email scythes@myphone.coop

Wimpole Scything Course

Saturday 24 June 2017

This course is always popular so early booking is recommended. Tel.: 0844 249 1895 (7 days a week 9am —5.30pm) or book online by following the link in:-
<https://sadeik.wordpress.com/blog/about/mowing/>

EQUIPMENT

Jigs

The quality and finish of the jigs coming from Slovakia has declined over the last two years. The bevel on the number two (yellow) cap has also become much flatter. David Kuegler has been employed to improve the bevel and polish them. I sent a sample of these to the manufacturer in Slovakia to see if he could finish them to the same standard, but after a complicated exchange in Slovak, the answer was "no".

I have been selling the unpolished jigs at £29 and the jigs polished in the UK at £36, but this might have to increase shortly because of the drop in the value of the pound.

Back from the Dead.

I hope to have some more Bregenzer stones in stock soon.

Simon Fairlie

Falci Blades.

Scythe Cymru is now selling Falci blades made in Italy. Information on the available blades can be found at www.scythecymru.co.uk/falci-scythe-blades/

We also have a number of single blades of various other Falci models that we imported to try out. Phil will bring these along to the West Country Scythe Festival if people are interested in seeing/trying them.

SCYTHING EVENTS

The Thirteenth West Country Scythe Festival

and
Green Fair

SUNDAY

11 JUNE 2017

Thorney Lakes,
Muchelney, Langport,
Somerset, TA10 0DW

SCYTHE CHAMPIONSHIP

- Team Mowing • Haymaking
- Scything Instruction • Crafts
- Stalls • Scythes for Sale
- Tools and Tat
- Campaigns • Speakers
- Kid's Area
- Hay for Play
- 2 Music Stages
- Ceilidh
- Organic food
- 2 Bars

SCYTHE COURSES

Improver's Masterclass 9-10 June

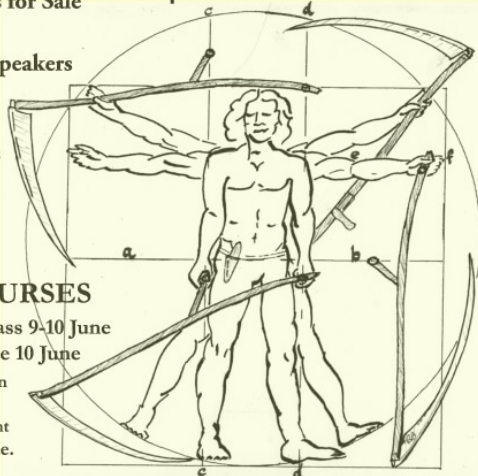
Beginner's Course 10 June

plus workshops on
Haymaking,
Grassland Management
and the English Scythe.

ENTRY

£5 per person
plus £5 Per Car

**KIDS
FREE**



Parking and Camping on Site

More information: 01297 561359 scythes@myphone.coop
www.thescytheshop.co.uk/festival.html; <http://www.greenfair.org.uk>

Green Scythe Fair Camping

Scythers overnighting at the Green Scythe Fair are encouraged to use the enlarged Scythers' Camp in the field to ease pressure on the official Thorney Lakes campsite. This is also available to those on both the scythe courses. Here are the options:

Thorney Lakes Caravan and Camping Park – open every day, fine flat pitches of mown grass, full range of facilities close by, £17 per night for up to two persons. See thorneylakes.co.uk for additional information, the full range of charges and booking. Saturday night (10th June) must be booked in advance to avoid disappointment.

Scythers Camp – available Thursday night through Sunday night (8th-11th June). The field will be mown, but ground conditions are variable. Facilities are basic (composting loos, water standpipe) and further away. £5 per person per night, plus Fair entry fees. If you would like to stay at the Scythers' Camp please me know beforehand so that we can gauge numbers, and pay me (not Thorney Lakes site office) on arrival.

Volunteers helping with the set up (some from around Wednesday) get free camping at the Scythers' Camp. If you would like to participate in this way please contact me so that jobs can be organised. Thank you.

Chris Riley: chris@pratensis.net Tel 07719 691312

Eighth Eastern Counties Scythe Festival

Wimpole, Cambridgeshire

24th - 25th June

A fun weekend on the National Trust Wimpole Estate in a windflower meadow overlooking the Capability Brown park.

The only event in the UK where you can enter in competitions varying from 5m x 5m right up to a quarter of an acre.

Demonstrations of blacksmithing, greenwood working and other rural crafts.

Basic free camping is available and there are spaces for stallholders (free if you demonstrate, otherwise there is a fee).

For more information go to
or email



Meadow Connections and the Northern Scythe Championships

7th- 9th July 2017

Set in the beautiful and ancient meadows of Lower Winskill Farm, Settle. North Yorkshire

A weekend long celebration of upland hay meadows Meadow Connections hopes to bring people together to enjoy and learn more about the beautiful upland hay meadows of the Yorkshire Dales so they might be protected and enjoyed for generations to come.

A Day of land based skills, art and craft workshops on Saturday. Beekeeping, flora and fauna identification, drawing, pottery, herbalism, jewellery making and archaeology.

Evening feast and ceilidh on Saturday night with bar provided by the local brewery.

Northern Scythe Championships on Sunday including farm history talks and herbal walks.



Tickets must be bought in advance. Whole weekend and day tickets available.
More information and ticket prices can be found at www.meadowconnections.co.uk
or send email to meadowconnections@gmail.com
Alternatively call Ruth on 07951 399176

The Gairloch Highland Gathering Saturday 1st July

Sands Caravan and Camping

There will also be a Friday night family ceilidh (on 30th June) and a dance on the evening of 2nd July as well as a variety of other activities at the 'Gathering on the 1st.

The scything competition is informal, friendly and we can cater for up to about 30 competitors based on how many plots can be prepared beforehand (enter on the day).

There will also be a Friday night family ceilid
Sands Caravan and Camping is at <http://www.sandscaravanandcamping.co.uk>

For further information contact
Peter Cunningham info@wrft.org
Phone 01445712899 Mob 07776 836003

Wimpole Practice Sessions

Wimpole Estate, Cambridgeshire

SABI members are invited to join our informal mowings during June, July and August.

This is a chance to improve your mowig skills while cutting some of our better meadows to provide "green hay" to spread wildflower seed to other parts of the estate.

We plan meet on Tuesday evenings.

For more information contact Jim McVittie (dalefield@ntlworld.com).

Dorset Wildlife Trust Hay Making Weekend

Kingcombe Meadows, West Dorset Sat 22nd and Sun 23rd July

Two days of mowing and marvelling at the famous and flower-rich Kingcombe Meadows nature reserve in West Dorset.

Scything and hay making in our working farm's wildflower meadows, with flower walks, kid's activities, BBQ and Barn Dance, farmhouse cheese and local cider.

Accommodation and camping available.

Please call 01300 321329 for details or
or email Nick Gray: ngray@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

Wood Meadows and Pastures Hallam University, Sheffield 23rd - 24th May

This 2-day conference is being organised by SYBRG, and has been proposed by eminent international writer and scholar, Professor George Peterken who will be a key-note speaker. It will partly celebrate his ground breaking book 'Meadows', and will address the history and ecology of wood meadows and pastures, together with their conservation and the potential for re-creation of new areas.

For more info see:- <http://www.ukeconet.org/woodmeadowspastures.html>

Ulster Wildlife
Rural crafts and cultural traditions
Monastery Meadows, Mount Lourdes
Grammar School Enniskillen
August 5th 2017

Join Ulster Wildlife at Monastery Meadows for a demonstration and explanation of traditional grassland practices such as scything, hay ruck making, hedge laying and other practices. This event is organised as part of the Save our Magnificent Meadows organisation which is working with communities in Fermanagh and Tyrone to help identify, manage and restore our remaining fragments of wildflower meadows.

For more information please visit our website:-
<http://www.ulsterwildlife.org/whats-on>

Skyegrove, Herodsfoot, Cornwall.
Scythers meet up & peening day
9th April 2017

For more info go to:-
www.skyegrove.co.uk
email kevin@skyegrove.co.uk
or phone Kevin Austin 07943 653825

Community Haystacks 2017
Walthamstow Marshes
East London

Sat 24th and Sun 25th of June

With scything workshops and a lunch time talk on commencing on Saturday
Community picnic, haystack building and scything competition on the Sunday.
Visit the website closer to the date for details and bookings.

www.h-a-y-s-t-a-c-k-s.info



Scything Summer School in
Estonia

20th - 23rd of July

Alam-Pedja nature reserve in Palupõhja
The event will be held on a magical wooded meadow near Emajõgi village.

Help restore this meadow and join in the Grand Scything Competition

Sightseeing opportunities in the medieval walled city of Tallin



The 25th Haymaking Festival at Ryghsetra, Buskerud County, Norway

14th - 15th July 2018

A course in the practical and theoretical management of ecologically important hay meadows, at Ryghsetra, Buskerud County, Norway. (In Norwegian: Slåttekurset på Ryghsetra.)

Organiser Naturvernforbundet i Buskerud ('The Nature Conservation Society'). The course has been running since 1994.

The course takes place over the second weekend in July, from Thursday afternoon to Sunday, finishing about 16.00. (Editors note: Please double check on the dates as the 1st July 2018 falls on a Sunday)

The venue is at Ryghsetra, a small farm in the municipality of Nedre Eiker, in Buskerud County. The farm is situated about 60km west of Oslo. The nearest village is Mjøndalen, and the nearest city is Drammen.

Accommodation is at Solsetra, a well-equipped mission centre right next door to Ryghsetra farm. Sleeping is arranged in double or triple bedrooms (bring sleeping equipment or sleeping bag), and there are WCs, showers, a large dining room and course auditorium. Our very good kitchen team makes all the meals. We can take up to 30-35 participants, and in addition there are about 30 helpers (including children and teenagers).

Editors note: (There's limited spaces for those outside Norway as it's a county sponsored event. So book early)

The wonderful botanically-rich hay meadow at Ryghsetra is characterised by the following:

No fertilizers are used

No chemicals (pesticides etc.) are used

The soil is left unploughed

Parts of the meadow have a very high biodiversity regarding the plants, fungi and insect life

During the course we mow with scythes the 3ha meadow, and stack the grass for drying on specially-built wood and wire hay-drying racks (in Norwegian: 'hesjing'). In addition, you will be invited to:
Learn to recognise the characteristic wildlife species of an ecologically important hay meadow.

Learn more about the traditional management of such important hay meadows.

Learn about the practical use of the scythe: how to put it together, how to sharpen it and keep it sharp, and how to cut the grass.

Participate in discussions and learn from people with practical experience in management of ecologically-

important farming landscapes. The course has become a national and international meeting place for people interested in such 'High Nature Value' (HNV) grasslands.

Briefly learn about the theoretical and practical management and establishment of pollarded trees.

Gain ideas for yourself on how to organise such courses involving practical work.

Learn much about the history and culture of the Old Norwegian farming landscape.

During parts of the course the participants might be divided into two groups, depending on their preferred language.



Getting there

Ryghsetra, is about 70 km west of Oslo, and 4 km from the nearest village, Mjøndalen. There are hourly trains from Oslo central station passing Mjøndalen. The journey takes less than one hour. (The same line also serves the main Oslo Gardermoen airport, if you are flying into Oslo that way. The journey time is then about 1½h). The course organisers will happily make agreements to pick you up from the railway station, if contacted in advance.

For a detailed program see Page 17

Course fees

Adult: 3_000 Norwegian kroner (NOK)

Other adults in the family /partner: 2_250 NOK

Student,/youth (15-20 years): 1_750 NOK

Child, aged 0 - 15 years: 1_000 NOK

Maximum fee, family: 6_500 NOK

N.B. The fee includes all food and accommodation during the course.

Bookings

Contact County secretary: Per Øystein Klunderud

Phone ++ 47 / 32 75 05 04 mob: ++ 47 948 86 503

email: pedrokl@online.no

COURSE DIRECTORY

Teachers marked with an asterisk usually have scythes for sale.

For courses on the English Scythe see Mark Allery.

Northern England

*Steve Tomlin**

stevetomlin8@gmail.com

SteveTomlinCrafts.wordpress.com/learn-to-scythe
Practical, fun courses covering all the skills to use and maintain your scythe. An internationally respected scythe expert, author of Learn to Scythe and sell scythe kits. I can travel to teach you or your group at your venue. Subscribe to my newsletter for more dates. Email stevetomlin8@gmail.com to book

Learn to Scythe 2 June or 22 Jul at Sedbergh, Cumbria

Learn to Scythe 20th August at Slaidburn, Lancashire

Peening workshop 16th Oct at Slaidburn, Lancashire

Jez Hastings

jeremyhastings@me.com www.singlemaltjacket.com
07725041946

I was taught to scythe in 1986 and have used this tool on my croft in the Hebrides to now being based in the Peak District and Midlands region as SABI coordinator. Courses are fully practical and will have you scything in no time at all! All equipment provided. I am also happy to travel to teach. Individual tutoring also catered for.

Way of the scythe April 23, Jul 23 Cwm Farm Forden

Way of the scythe May 21, Sept 3 Sharpecliffe Hall Ipstones

Peening day 22nd October Cwm Farm Forden

*Jonathan Dent**

York, North Yorkshire jonathan@stnicks.org.uk

Learn to scythe and how to use this traditional skill to improve the management of meadows and grasslands.

Courses held at St Nicks Local Nature Reserve and I can also travel to teach across Yorkshire. Visit our website for more info.

Introduction to Scything for Grassland Management
Workshops – 26th July, 19th August 2017 – £50

Wales

*David Kuegler**

Parry's Meadow, Orcop Hill, Hereford

david.kuegler@btinternet.com

Teach beginners to Scythe, Sharpen & Peen in my own meadow including mowing around trees. Steve Tomlin's 'Learn to Scythe book', is covered.

Home cooked lunch on course (John Letts 'bread'). Will travel to teach.

2016 Meadows Day: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CRFQ6RH5Zc&feature=youtu.be>

Scything equipment provided and available to purchase; made to fit peening pony & meadow products.

Learn to Scythe @ Orcop Hill, Hereford, Course Dates: (from £50.00, including lunch)

April 8, May 6, July 6, Scything, Sharpening & Peening

June 8 'an early fathers day present scything session'

Jun 24 Gardens in the Wild, Whitfield Estate, Hereford

*Phillip Batten**

Dyfed Permaculture Farm Trust, Carmarthenshire

scythecymru@yahoo.co.uk www.scythecymru.co.uk

Learn to scythe or improve your skills. Workshops give you lots of hands on experience; a chance to "try before you buy" or get your own scythe set up well; a visit to a smallholding where scythes are integral to the management and is used year round in a variety of

situations.

Introductory Scythe Courses – Sat 27th May, Wed 12th July, Sun 6th August, Tues 15th August- £60 / £50

(low wage concession)

Peening and Sharpening Workshops – Sun 2nd April, Sat 22nd July, – £40

"Mowing with Ease" Mowing Workshop – Sun 23rd July

*Andrea Gilpin**

Wild Meadow, Discoed, Presteigne, Powys

hello@wildmeadow.co www.wildmeadow.co

Learn to scythe with ease and flow. Covering all aspects including peening. Scythes provided and available to purchase. Practice on a variety of terrain and vegetation. At the end of the day we can also look at the various areas on site and chat about how to establish and maintain a flower rich meadow.

Learn to scythe – Sun 7th May, Sat 24th June, Sun 27th August – £50 Other dates to be confirmed

South West England

*Chris Riley**

(North Dorset) chris@pratensis.net 07719 691312
www.pratensis.net

Available for scythe training in the Wessex area.

For the following beginners' courses, see the relevant web sites for info and to book. Scythes available for purchase. Contact me direct if you are intending to buy (no obligation) and with other questions.

Northleach, North Glos. Wed 31st May 2017. See (i) Langridge, near Bath. Thursday 15th June 2017.

www.floralocale.org

South Glos. Early Jul 2017 – venue and date t.b.c. See (i) Kingcombe Centre, Dorset. Sat 22nd Jul 2017. Go to www.kingcombe.org

Friary, near Bath. Wed 16th August 2017. (i)

www.cotswoldsruralskills.org.uk

*Andi Rickard**

andirickard@me.com 0758 1239453

Ladies UK Scything Champion since 2010, now in my fifth year of teaching throughout the South West. I teach in my home town of Wellington. Course dates booked by arrangement, one-to-one sessions or group bookings, £65 per person. I am also available to come and teach at your venue. Peening workshops by arrangement.

May 25, Scything for beginners and improvers at The Old Kennels on the Blackdown Hills. Go to www.theoldkennels.co.uk for info and to book. Cost £70

August 3rd and August 11th, Scything for Beginners at RHS Rosemoor, Devon. Go to www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/rosemoor for details and to book. (£70 members, £81 non-members)

*Kevin Austin**

Skyegrove, Herodsfoot, Cornwall. 07943653825

www.skyegrove.co.uk kevin@skyegrove.co.uk

Beginners scything course: 27 May and 5 Aug 2017 £65 inc lunch)

Improvers scything course: 9 Sept – £65(inc lunch)

Alternatively, if you prefer, we can come to your land to deliver the course for a group of students (6 max) the cost is £200

South East England

*Nicole Clough**

Oxfordshire good_clean_mud@icloud.com

I provide training in the use, maintenance and joy of the Austrian scythe. My one day sessions can be tailored for one-to-ones or small groups within Oxfordshire and the surrounding counties. With a specialism in nature conservation, I can also advise on land management for wildlife and biodiversity. To discuss your requirements, please get in touch.

Mark Allery*

Haslemere mark@woodlandantics.com <https://woodlandantics.wordpress.com/scythes/>

I use scythes regularly for traditional orchard, meadow, heathland and woodland management and run bespoke courses for conservation groups and volunteer organisations. I teach and sell Austrian Scythes but specialise in the use, remaking and history of the traditional English Scythe including steam bending the snathes. Learn to mow with a scythe 1 July, 12 August at Weald & Downland Museum (please book with the museum) English Scythe Course 8th July at Weald & Downland Museum (please book with the museum) Learn to mow with a scythe Sat 3rd June & Thurs 7th September at Rosamund Meadow for Transition Guildford

East Anglia

Richard Brown* *Norfolk. richardjbrown556@gmail.com

Botanist, ecologist and seedsman offers scythe courses and tuition by arrangement. Can tailor courses for individuals or groups to include practical scythe instruction plus wildflower meadow and grassland management. Visit Emorsgate Seeds

<<https://wildseed.co.uk/articles/2017/02/01/scythe-training-events-and-courses-2017> website for more details or email as above.

Practical scything & grassland management. Wed 28 June 2017. A 'flora locale' course aimed at land managers and other practitioners involved in the design, management and restoration of wild plants and habitats for biodiversity. Fee £100 / £75 concessions – Fee £100 / £75 concessions – to book contact flora locale <<https://www.floralocale.org/Practical%20scything%20and%20grassland%20management>>

Chris Riley*

chris@pratensis.net 07719 691312 www.pratensis.net Assington Mill, near Sudbury, Suffolk. Sun 14 May 2017 For further information on this beginners' course, and to book, go to www.assingtonmill.com Scythes available for purchase. Contact me direct if you are intending to buy, or with other questions.

Simon Lamb* uslambs@tiscali.co.uk 01379 740905 Get in touch to arrange a date. £60 for a days tuition.

Scotland

Steve Tomlin*

Cumbria, England stevetomlin8@gmail.com SteveTomlinCrafts.wordpress.com Steve has taught several courses in Scotland, as far north as Caithness. Email to book a group workshop at your own venue and Steve will travel to you which is much more economical. Read about my scythe course near Ellen, Aberdeenshire.

Ireland

Chris Hayes*

Wexford, Ireland, chris@badgershillforestry.ie Learn to use a scythe in the wonderful environment of the Irish National Heritage Park in Ferrycarrig, Wexford. See www.inhp.com for details about booking, payment and all our wonderful courses! Learn to Mow with an Austrian Scythe May 20th and June 17th

Channel Islands

Fiona Pollock

Guernsey and Channel Islands fionapollockuk@yahoo.co.uk or 07781 435 395 Based in Guernsey but willing to island hop upon discussion. Individual and group lessons available for beginners or improvers. The scythe is a diverse tool that can be used in a variety of situations. You will learn the foundational skills necessary to get going confidently with the scythe. I stock and sell scythe kits.

National

If you have a group of friends and your own grass, the following teachers can be booked to come and teach at your own location.

Steve Tomlin*

Cumbria stevetomlin8@gmail.com stevetomlin8crafts.wordpress.com/learn-to-scythe Courses across the UK for beginners and improvers, run by an internationally respected mower and tutor. I have been teaching since 2010 and am the author of the Learn to Scythe book, the first practical instruction manual for the Austrian scythe.

Philip Batten*

Dyfed Permaculture Farm Trust, Carmarthenshire scythecymru@yahoo.co.uk www.scythecymru.co.uk Learn to scythe or improve your skills. Workshops give you lots of hands on experience; a chance to "try before you buy" or get your own scythe set up well; a visit to a smallholding where the scythe is integral to the management and is used year round in a variety of situations.

Chris Riley*

chris@pratensis.net 07719 691312 Experienced scythesman and trainer. I mainly deliver beginners' courses in the Wessex area, but sometimes it can be feasible to go further afield. Austrian scythes available for purchase. See web site for more information www.pratensis.net

Fiona Pollock *

Guernsey and Channel Islands fionapollockuk@yahoo.co.uk or 07781 435 395 Based in Guernsey but willing to island hop upon discussion. Individual and group lessons available for beginners or improvers. The scythe is a diverse tool that can be used in a variety of situations. You will learn the foundational skills necessary to get going confidently with the scythe. I stock and sell scythe kits.

Andrea Gilpin*

Wild Meadow, Discoed, Presteigne, Powys hello@wildmeadow.co www.wildmeadow.co Learn to scythe with ease and flow. Covering all aspects including peening. Scythes provided and available to purchase. Practice on a variety of terrain and vegetation. At the end of the day we can also look at the various areas on site and chat about how to establish and maintain a flower rich meadow.

Hay Disposal

Some Ideas From

Richard Brown

For the last 35 years, I have been encouraging people to go out and create thousands of small scale wild flower meadows. As such I feel some responsibility towards finding ways to make these meadows a success. For this, good management (mowing) is more important than sowing the right seed. It soon became clear to me that two biggest practical obstacles people reported were firstly, how to cut small to medium sized meadows without expensive equipment or contractors; and secondly what to do with the cut material.



The Austrian scythe has provided a solution to the mowing problem. This leaves the next problem of what to do with all the cut material? The answer in traditional terms would seem obvious: use it as hay to feed livestock. This however does not work for many wildlife and amenity meadows which are created in parks, gardens and road verges with no livestock to feed. Hay from urban meadows is frequently unusable as fodder due to contamination with ragwort, litter or dog mess. Even within agri-environment schemes the demise of mixed farming means that many do not have either livestock or grassland machinery.

A meadow will yield 2 - 8 tonnes of dry hay per hectare (0.2 - 0.8 kg/m²). A 250m² (tennis court size) mini-meadow will produce a sizable heap or about 5 x 25kg compressed hay bales (typical small square type).

The options for disposing of cut grass/hay are: use it as fodder, burn it, dump it or compost it. I continue to explore all these options trying to find the best solutions.

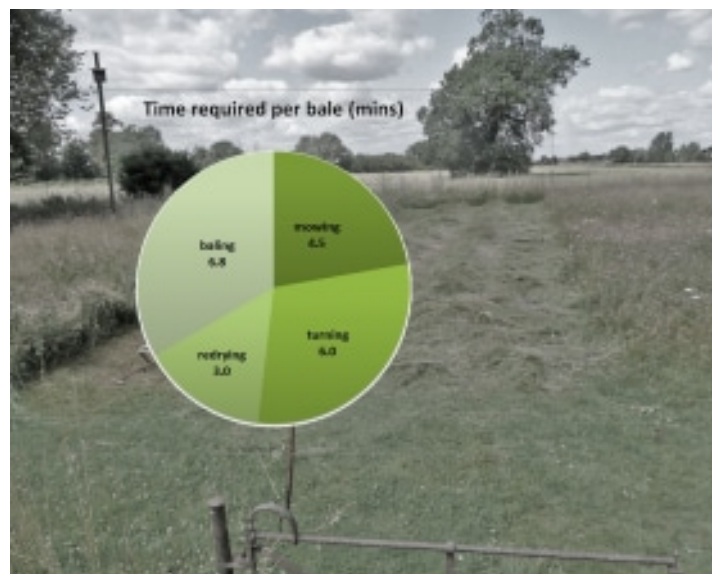
Use it as fodder.

If you can make good hay you do have a chance of finding a home for it. I make hay from the better parts

of my meadow. Haymaking by hand involves quite a bit of work and angst, especially in an unsettled weather! However, even if you get your sweet hay all dry and stacked you will probably find it hard to give away in quantity as loose hay; pony owners for example are generally reluctant to transport, handle and store loose hay. To get over this hurdle I have built myself a hand hay baler which produces handy sized mini-bales 10kg each; convenient for pet owners and fit in a car boot.

To produce each 10kg bale I calculate that it takes me a total of 20 minutes work: 4.5mins mowing, 6 minutes turning plus an extra 3mins re-spreading to dry after inevitable shower, and 6.5 minutes hand baling.

Based on national minimum wage I need to recoup about £2.50 per bale to break even: do-able I think if I could get enough pet owner sales from the roadside. I produce about 60 of these mini-bales each summer. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=8XLe3yesTRk



I am still left with quite a bit of spoil or unusable cut grass and hay to dispose of.

Burn it. Bit of a last resort this one. It can be difficult to get a clean smoke free burn unless the hay is really dry. Smoke pollution and nuisance means burning is impractical in many situations. The fire site will have unwanted nutrient residues from the ash which will encourage weeds at the expense of wild flowers. Bio-digestion and burning commercially for biofuel are options being explored for larger grassland schemes such as road verges. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lincolnshire-36390785>

Dump it or compost it.

The simplest option is often just to stack the cut material in heaps or stacks on site. These can function as habitat piles as refuge for hedgehogs and if you are

lucky grass snakes. The problem with stacking on site is that it can take up increasing amount of space as stacked hay takes years to decompose. Decomposing hay stacks also leave a behind patches of nutrient



enriched soil which both encourages coarse weeds and suppresses plant diversity. For this reason, heaps need to be placed in sacrificial areas where this does not matter.

Mulch. I use a small amount directly as mulch around fruit trees and shrubs.

Composting. This is becoming the most attractive option to me for my waste grass and hay. My objective is to speed up the rate of decomposition and disposal and end up with useable compost to use as mulch on my no-dig veg plots. In this way the system becomes a win-win way of harvesting nutrients and organic matter from my meadow and grassland where it is not wanted, transferring them to my veg plot where I do need them and can avoid the need for other inputs (fertiliser). A bit like a small scale medieval nutrient cropping cycle, but without livestock.

Hay and late cut grass has a carbon: nitrogen ratio of 40-60:1, much higher than the ideal 30:1 needed for efficient composting. Cut grass is also often too dry. One solution to this is to water with collected urine which adds both N and water (not managed to organise this with the family!)

Lawn clippings (yes I confess I have some) conversely has too low C:N (15-20:1), and if stacked alone slumps to an airless stinking mass. My solution has been to mix and layer hay with lawn clippings to average closer to 30:1 and try to maintain a better aerated structure and water balance (cover in winter to prevent waterlogging, water in summer if needed). It is not a perfect system, it still takes two years before it can be used (partly because I am a lazy composter and don't turn it enough).

I have been pleased with the results using this compost on my no-dig veg plot in a section of my garden that lost its topsoil during building works.

Because my heaps only include grass, hay and kitchen waste I find I have few weed problems compared to open soil (even tho I don't reliably get my heap to very high temperatures).

My objective going forward is to improve my composting technique, especially to get a more friable less dense product which is easier to move (I cheated and resorted to using a mini digger last year). Secondly to work out the optimum ratio of grassland to veg plots for the nutrient transfer process.

Blythe's Scythes Over 2,000 in stock

In the year 1666, a scythe dealer in the Sheffield area had an inventory that listed over 2,000 scythes. His name was William Blythe. Blythe's Scythes?

As described in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales* (edited by Joan Thirsk),

"In north Derbyshire, men turned instead to the metal trades. In 1672 over 100 smithies were recorded in the parishes which lay immediately south of Sheffield. Nailers, cutlers, and sickle makers were to be found in the scattered settlements of Eckington parish, and the scythemakers were concentrated in the parish of Norton. Typical of these craftsmen were Henry Brownell of Jordanthorpe (1634), who had farm goods worth £29 and 256 scythes valued at £17 5s. 4d..."

"The local gentry owned furnaces, forges, slitting mills, and charcoal woods, and William Bullock of Norton, esquire (1667), was a gentleman-manufacturer on a considerable scale, with axes and hoes valued at £190. His neighbor, William Blythe, a yeoman whose timber-framed house still stands at Norton Lees, was a prosperous farmer and miller and, like his father, an organizer of the scythe trade. In 1666 his inventory listed over 2,000 scythes, including special Scottish and Holderness scythes, which he sold in the northern market towns, well away from the markets of the Belbroughton scythesmiths. The trade in agricultural edge tools was both extensive and profitable."

(from *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, Vol.V: 1640-1750, Part 1, edited by Joan Thirsk, Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 134)

More details about the Blythe family, and a great deal of related history, can be found at bishopshouse.wordpress.com

--submitted by Steve Leppold

Fascination in the Faroes

by
Michelle Laine and Phil Batten

In March 2015 we went to the Faroe Islands. The archipelago, lying between Shetland and Iceland, is a self-governing country within the Kingdom of Denmark. One of the most amazing place we visited was the little community of Saksun which sits on a shelf of flat land, plunging down to a tidal lagoon on one side and rising to the mountains behind.

The blade, about 75cm, is considered to be long for the islands. Shorter, narrower blades such as used elsewhere in Scandinavia were more common.

Traditionally all hay making was done on the sloping land just up from the bottoms of the valleys. This land is faster draining and therefore dryer. Here is where



Dúvugarðar, with tidal lagoon beyond.

Saksun is home to Dúvugarðar. Described as “An old medium-sized King’s farm supporting a flock of some 300 breeding sheep.”, the buildings, some of which are up to 200 years old, now form an outdoor museum. The museum owner grew up in Saksun and still runs the family farm. He lives in a more modern farm house close to the museum rather than this house where his Grandmother grew up. At times up to 30 people lived in this building, which would now be considered crowded for an average sized family. The farmhouse. The oldest half is to the right, with two phases of extensions to the left.

Phil found a snath and a hay rake hanging up in one corner of the house and a scythe blade tucked away in another. Written on the blade were the words “Mossiu stöbestaal”, and on the tang is stamped “Dana BB”.





Evidence can be seen of former hay / barley cultivation on the lower slopes of the hills

crops such as barley were grown too. The evidence of past cultivation can be clearly seen in the landscape, including the frequent ditches to aid with drainage on these wet islands. Sometimes these ditches are so close together that there could only have been room for two or three scythe swaths between them.

Elsewhere on the island we found frequent evidence of the use of hay drying fences, some looking fairly abandoned, others tidy and still in use.

Machines gradually supplanted the scythe, although the scythe was being used to cut the edges of the ditches that were



Traditional stone hay shed with a walled Angelica garden to the right; rightmost is a meat drying shed.

inaccessible to tractors as late as the 1980s. 300 breeding sheep are still kept at Dúvugarðar, hefted to the mountains in a similar way to hill sheep



Hay drying fence, Viðareidi

in this country. Historically the farm also kept six cows, housed in the barn adjoining the main living space in the winter, meaning the need to make hay would have been much greater then it is now. It is said

that the small, hardy Faroese cow, now unfortunately extinct, was housed for as short a time as possible to eke out the hay hard won from this challenging landscape. Cattle are still kept in the islands but seem to be restricted to a few specialised farms, with the majority of forage harvested on the more favourable land. <http://www.savn.fo/00647/01173/01187/>



Hay drying fence, Syðradalur



This end of the house was the cow shed. The main living area begins where the wall juts out.

Explaining Peening to Mr MacGregor

*“The haymakers are at work; and half their work is hammering the soft edges of their miserable scythes.”
John MacGregor, A Thousand Miles in the Rob Roy Canoe on Rivers and Lakes of Europe, 1866.*

Ahoy there! British tourist, steer your craft
To the bank beside our meadow and alight.
You may think our hammering is daft,
But let me show you why it is the right
Approach for folk in our situation.

We are peasants, those who stayed behind
When our brothers sailed crossed the ocean
To find a sea of grass and found a nation.
We stood our ground, and stuck with our soil.
Dispel from your mind any notion
That we are wealthy. We are not the kind
Of proprietors to employ a band
Of migrant mowers, specialists in toil,
Fit as Irish fiddles, strong as whiskey,
To mow and make the hay in one fell swoop
On acres too numerous for a single hand.
We make our hay from May until November
Mowing when the weather's not too risky
And between times we must remember
To top the weeds, reap corn and cut the stover,
While women daily gather in fresh clover
For cow and rabbits and the chicken coop.
Hence our scythes are lightweight and adaptable;
We shun those that are heavy and intractable.

Here! Take this blade. Hold it. Can you feel
How light it is? That's because the steel
Is not so hard as that preferred of late
For Anglo Saxon scythes. This softer metal
Is sooner worked, and so our smiths can settle
A curve into the blade in each dimension.
(See how in its length the blade sweeps up,
And how the cross-section forms a cup)
Effectively the blade is under tension,
And so has greater strength for given weight.
The downside is that, though both light and strong,
It doesn't hold an edge for very long.
No matter — quick to dull is quick to hone:
You need but fifteen seconds with the stone.

But what explains the hammering, you ask —
The clatter that you take for work of fools?
Consider a problem common to both tools:
A scythesman in the rhythm of his task.

Mows, then hones, then mows and hones and mows:
Relentless attrition steadily eats
into the steel — the fine edged bevel retreats
To thicker metal, making a bull-nose
Of what had been a keen fox's snout.
The rub is how to get that bull-nose out.

The Anglo Saxon scythe of harder steel
Requires a session on the grinding wheel
An activity undertaken at some cost
According to a poem by Robert Frost.¹
But whereas you rely upon abrasion
We Danube folk prefer to use persuasion.

See this anvil planted in the ground.
I place the blade's edge on it upside down,
Seat it snug, make sure to keep it level
And tapping with a hammer on the bevel,
(Not too hard for fear the blade may buckle)
Coax the metal forward, make it flow,
Squeeze the steel flat like pastry dough.
I keep on tapping in a steady line
Until I've forged the bevelled edge so fine
It flexes when I press it with my knuckle —
That's the sign that the blade is ready.
A quick flick with the stone, and it will cut a
Swathe through the grass like knife through butter.

Though light and small and soft, we like the scythe
Which you treat with ignorant contempt,
And those of us of a mechanic bent
Derive a curious pleasure from the peening.
Your attitude's a trifle overweening:
Time, as you well know, exacts its tithe,
And as when scything winds sweep through the fields
The oak may snap while humble willow yields,
So as the scythe of time sweeps tools aside.
Ours may yet be quick when yours has died.

S.F.

¹ The Grindstone, by Robert Frost, which we published in Windrow issue 8, can be found here http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/robert_frost/poems/805

The Scything Handbook by Ian Miller

A Review by Chris Riley



The Scything Handbook is a new guide from the USA, with the subtitle 'Learn how to cut grass, mow meadows & harvest grain by hand'. Experienced mowers as well as those new to the art will find something of interest in this volume. The sections on hay-making and small grains will be useful to some, especially the former,

but many UK readers would probably prefer something on wild flower meadows. However few scythe enthusiasts will be able to resist it, if they have £14.99 to spare.

I have taken this opportunity to compare the book with others available on scythes and scything. Full details of each are provided at the end of this article. For 35 years Tressemer's 'The Scythe Book' was THE scythe book. Since 2001 it had Peter Vido's addendum, adding half as much again to the book. At 200 pages many will find it long-winded and repetitive. It has been out of print for some years, then, perhaps reflecting the growth of interest in continental scythes on both sides of the Atlantic, two scythe books are published within a couple of years. Tomlin's 'Learn to Scythe' is a more concise guide, with lots of colour photographs, and a more modern feel, whereas Miller's 'The Scything Handbook' harks back to Tressemer/Vido in its scale and style.

The monochrome drawings in The Scything Handbook (and a few photographs) have a timeless air, which many will prefer to gaudy colour. These illustrations are well executed and provide in the main great clarity. I am also reminded of John Seymour's 'Self-Sufficiency' manual (1976) which has this style. The hardback cover has an understated design. I will give Miller credit and suggest that it was the publishers that came up with the graphic on the cover, showing a scythe with an overly open hafting angle! The circular script of the book's title, echoing the sweep of a scythe blade, is repeated with chapter headings, which is a bit irritating as some of the words are upside-down. This is a minor criticism as otherwise the book has a very pleasing appearance.

UK based Filbert Press, a newly established company, have done a good job promoting the new book. It is aimed at gardeners and smallholders, has been offered in local book shops, and reviewed (by writers on gardening and smallholding) in national publications. At least one person (by March 2017) has joined SABI after reading the book, so evidently it is inspiring readers to delve further into the world of scything.

Instructions and explanations in the book are at times a little long-winded, but in the main will get people mowing just fine. If your sole aim in reading a book about scything is to learn the skills however, then I suggest Tomlin for a clear and concise manual. Miller's comparison of the movement with a den-den daiko (Japanese pellet drum) is to my mind not such a good analogy, but if it suits some learners then that's OK. Setting of the right hand grip at 'hip or belt level' is somewhat imprecise, and there could be more on safety procedures.

The section on Alexander technique is interesting. Perhaps this is an alternative to the Tai Chi method, though I'm sure these approaches are not mutually exclusive. I find myself lengthening my spine, according to the Alexander Technique concept, regularly throughout the day at the moment, so it's doing me some good already.

Some of the arrangement of chapters is odd, with a two page 'Getting the best from your scythe' should either have been included in the main chapter on setting up, or have perhaps been expanded into a Vido-esque treatise.

Free-hand peening is covered adequately for beginners. Cross-sectional diagrams are mostly useful, and blade repair is covered as well. However peening stools are not described, and that other great convenience the peening jig is dismissed because, Miller says, "the results are less satisfactory" and "you are dependent on a piece of specialized equipment". I regard this as a serious omission, as jigs are important for making peening accessible to many. Tomlin on the other hand, helps you decide which method to use and covers all methods really well.

Another serious omission in my view is any significant treatment of the anglo-american scythe. Strangely, and alarmingly, Miller says these "were developed to harvest sugar cane and reed and are not suitable for hay and small grain harvesting"! For many people on both sides of the Atlantic the anglo-american type is the first and perhaps only experience of a scythe, and a better account would be fitting in this type of book. There is an 18 page account of the history and manufacture of continental scythe blades, which is great, but the history and manufacture of anglo-american equipment is also fascinating.

The 20 page chapter on small grains may encourage some to have a go, but the 24 page chapter on haymaking is probably more relevant to the current needs of smallholders. There is an analysis of the process, and clear illustrations of different types of racks, including scandinavian wire racks. A comparison table of the different kinds of racks

provides a good structured summary. This is a much more orderly account than Tressemer's chapter on haymaking. However Simon Fairlie in 'Managing grass in Britain with the scythe' covers similar subject matter to Miller. Fairlie puts more emphasis on progressive haymaking (ie doing it bit by bit), and covers better the practicalities of handling loose hay.

Returning to small grains, Miller's account is again a more orderly and attractive chapter than Tressemer's, but I will leave it to those with more experience to say which is the better guide.

None of the books covered in this article describe how to manage or create a wild flower meadow, except for Fairlie. Perhaps it's not a 'thing' in north America. Fairlie's concise guide to the principles of nutrient reduction, and number and timing of cuts, is very pertinent. Fairlie also deals well with another common situation in Britain, difficult meadows that are neglected and tangled.

My conclusion is that The Scything Handbook does succeed in its aim helping readers to 'learn how to mow meadows and harvest grain by hand'. There are some omissions and shortcomings, as described above, but overall it is a pleasant book which will encourage people to pick up a scythe and mow. Miller's Endnote

strikes the right tone, a rallying call, and an assertion that (as we all know) taking up the scythe really can change your life.

I suggest that anyone with further critique of Miller's and other authors' treatment of scything techniques, should be encouraged to share and discuss on the pages of Windrow or other forums available to SABI members.

The Scything Handbook by Ian Miller (Filbert Press 2016) Hardback 144 pages ISBN: 978-0-9933892-4-5 Available from the usual book suppliers.

Learn To Scythe by Steve Tomlin (Self published 2015) 80 pages. Available on-line at stevetomlincrafts.wordpress.com

The Scythe Book (2nd Edition) by David Tressemer & Peter Vido (A.C. Hood 2001) Paperback 200 pages ISBN: 978-0-911469-19-6 Out of print, but still available new and used on-line.

Managing Grass in Britain with the Scythe by Simon Fairlie (Self published latest edition 2015) 60 pages. Available from www.thescytheshop.co.uk

Detailed Programme

For the 26th Haymaking Festival Ryghsetra, Buskerud County, Norway

Thursday

16.00 - 18.00 Arrival & lodging. Time for the first visit into the meadow?
18.00 - 19.00 Dinner.
Followed by welcome and presentation of participants, course co-workers and practical information.
19.00 - 21.30 Walk into the meadow.
The grass is put on the first hay-drying rack!
21.30 - Social intercourse, inside or outside.

Friday

08.00 - 09.00 Breakfast
09.00 - 11.30 Basic introduction about the scythe.
Practical demonstration of cutting and sharpening.
11.30 - 12.00 Coffee and cakes in the meadow.
12.00 - 14.00 Group A: Further instruction in use of the scythe & cutting.
Group B: Botany and fauna in the meadow.
14.00 - 15.15 Dinner
15.15 - 17.15 Group A: Botany and fauna in the meadow
Group B: Further instruction in use of the scythe & cutting.
Making bread in the old oven.
17.30 - 18.30 Working together, mowing and putting grass on the hay-drying rack.
19.00 - 20.00 Supper
21.00 - Social intercourse.

Saturday

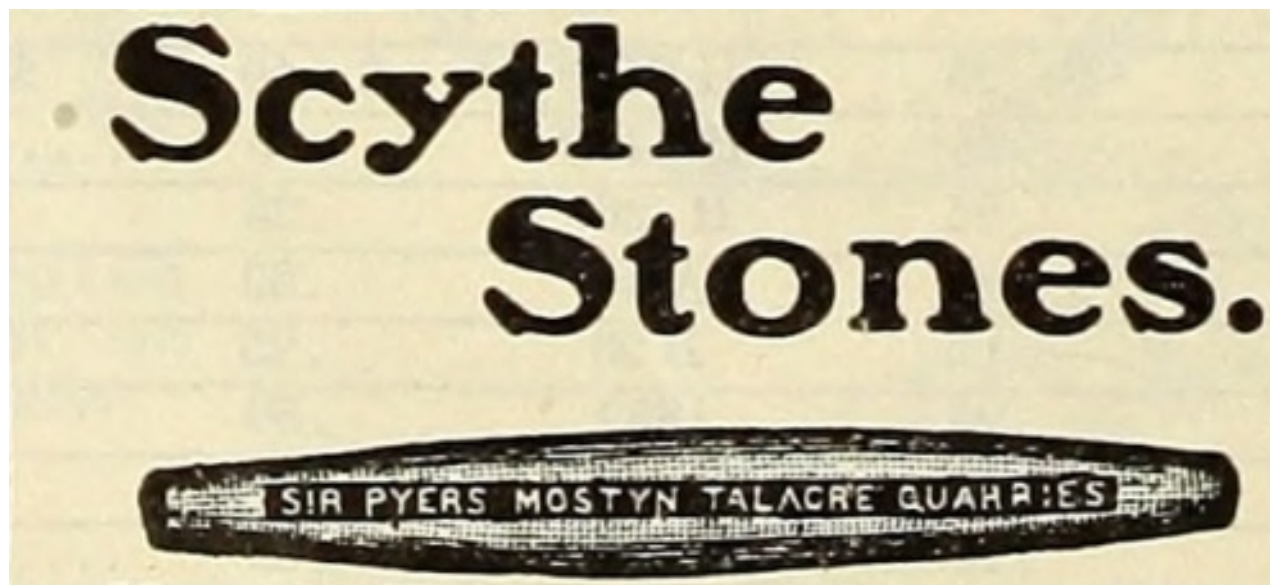
06.00 - 07.30 Morning coffee/bath and "early morning" cutting of the grass in the meadow.
07.30 - 08.30 Breakfast
08.30 - 10.00 Continuing working.
Demonstration of 2-wheeled cutting machine.
10.15 - 12.00 Pollarded trees: theoretical knowledge and practical use of the knife and saw.
Continuing work in the meadow.
12.15 - 13.00 Lunch at Ryghsetra.
13.00 - 16.00 Open day for the public (in Norwegian: 'Slåttegilde') in the meadow at Ryghsetra. Different activities.
19.00 - Big fiesta / dinner for the haymakers and co-workers. Social intercourse and cultural events. If the weather permits, we continue into the early hours of the night in the meadow!

Sunday

08.00 - 09.00 Breakfast
09.00 - 13.00 Finishing the work in the meadow. Discussions.
13.00 - 14.00 Dinner.
14.00 - 15.00 Cleaning & washing of all rooms, common area etc.
15.00 - 16.00 Termination of the course. Evaluation with feedback and farewells from participants.
16.00 Finish

Welsh Sandstone for Superior Scythe Stones

by Steve Leppard



Less than 20 miles (as the crow flies) from the city streets of Liverpool is a location where "superior quality" scythe stones were quarried, and they were still being produced and marketed internationally into the 20th century. "Gwespyr sandstone" and "Talacre stone" were named for the village of Gwespyr and nearby Talacre, not far from the Point of Ayr in Flintshire, Wales.

Sandstone from this formation was used in the construction of Basingwerk Abbey during the 12th century, and Flint Castle during the 13th century. It acquired a good reputation as freestone for buildings. In 1840, the Royal Institute of British Architects reported that "the closeness of its texture and the fineness of its grain render it very desirable for external work...", and "for landings and steps, the Talacre stone far exceeds the very best kinds of Yorkshire stone, as it is superior in strength..."

(Source: *The Civil Engineer and Architect's Journal*, London, June 1840, page 209)

Some of this dense sandstone was used to make scythe stones which were highly regarded. Talacre stones were reportedly awarded first prize at the 1851 Great Exhibition at London (among 12 competing scythe stones).

By 1852, "Talacre Burr" scythe stones were being exported to America, and according to an article titled "A New Whetstone" (in the *New England Farmer*), "the sharpness of their grit is valuable, as it cuts the gum from the scythe, and from the stone which always collects on them when the dew is off the grass, thus leaving both entirely free and clean."

(Source: *New England Farmer*, Vol. IV, No. 12, Boston, Dec. 1852, p. 558)

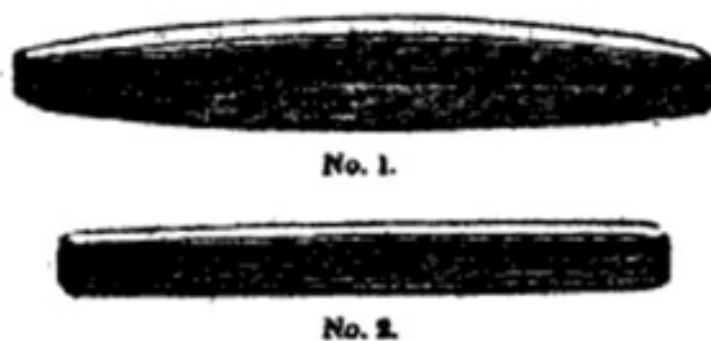
In an 1852 article titled "The Talacre Burr Scythe Stone" (in *The Working Farmer*, published in New

From 1906 Griffith and Turner catalog

York), the stone receives this praise: "The quality is very superior to any we have ever tried for this purpose, and unlike many other sandstones, is not liable to enamel on the surface."

In 1858, the "Talacre Scythe Stone Quarry" (owned by Sir Pyers Mostyn) was producing an average annual

The Talacre Burr Scythe Stone.



(Source: *The Working Farmer*, New York, September 1, 1852, p.164)

output of "10 to 12,000 doz. scythe stones." The prices at the quarry, per dozen scythe stones, ranged from 1s. 7d. to 1s.10d.

(Source: *Mineral Statistics of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland for the Year 1858*, by Robert Hunt, London, 1859, pages 266-267)

By 1858, "Real Talacre Scythe Stones" were being exported to Australia.

(Source: *advert in The South Australian Register*, 23 Oct 1858, page 4)

An 1861 catalogue from New York shows another view of "the English Talacre, which took the first premium at the World's Fair. It is a very superior stone, having a coarse, soft, sharp grit."

An 1873 newspaper advert in Australia stated:
 “Harvest Tools... Now Landing... for the coming season...

250 cases, each 6 dozen “Talacre” scythe stones...”
 (Source: *Town and Country Journal*, Sydney, 25 Oct 1873, p. 32)

Production into the 20th Century



Fig. 151. Scythe Rifles.



Fig. 152. Scythe Stones.

Fig. 151 represents the most approved forms of Scythe Rifles, of which we have a large variety.

Fig. 152. The first in the cut represents the English Talacre, which took the first premium at the World's Fair. It is a very superior stone, having a coarse, soft, sharp grit. The others represent the stones quarried in this country, of which we have a full assortment.

(Source: *Charles V. Mapes' Illustrated Catalogue*, 1861, p. 102)

A 1902 list of quarries in the Liverpool/ North Wales region shows three different companies involved at Talacre/Gwespyr:

- Talacre Quarries, Holywell address, 6 employed inside, 39 outside.
- Talacre Hall Quarries, Holywell address, 8 employed inside, 18 outside.
- Talacre and Gwespyr, Liverpool address, 14 employed inside.

(Source: *Quarries, Year 1902: List of Quarries (under the Quarries Act, 1894) in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and the Isle of Man; Prepared by His Majesty's Inspectors of Mines*, London, 1903, page 276)

Talacre scythe stones obviously had a good reputation and were priced accordingly. They even attracted some imitators. An American wholesale catalog from 1903 lists three types of scythe stones, including an imitation Talacre at half the price:

- Imported English Talacre, 20 cents
- Imitation English Talacre, 10 cents
- Red End, 4 cents

(Source: *Wholesale Catalogue for Market Growers and Florists*, Peter Henderson & Co., New York, 1903)

Another American catalog from 1903 listed only one type of scythe stone (Talacre, imported, at 25 cents each). A scythe blade (American lawn) was listed at 75 cents each. This is somewhat similar to present-day pricing, with some high-end scythe stones being sold for about 1/3 the cost of a scythe blade.

(Source: *Vaughan's Seed Store*, New York and Chicago, 1903 catalog, page 106)

A Welsh newspaper article from 1906 mentions the scythe stone quarries still operating at Gwespyr: “Employees excursion: The workmen employed at Mr. T. Pennant Williams' scythe-stone quarries were treated by their employer to an outing to Birkenhead, an excursion which was much enjoyed by those who availed themselves of the opportunity.”

(Source: *Prestatyn Weekly*, 1 Sept 1906)

An American farm and garden supplies catalog from 1907 lists a variety of scythe stones, with the “Imported English Talacre” being the most expensive. It specifies “None genuine unless labeled Sir Pyers Mostyn, Talacre Quarries.”

(Source: *Griffith and Turner Co.*, 1907 catalog, Baltimore, page 57)

In 1920, the following announcement appeared in an Australian newspaper, after a long wait for shipping: “Farmers – Two years ago we ordered from England five cases of genuine “Talacre” scythe stones. They are now to hand. – D.E. Hunter and Sons.”




Fig. 32.

SCYTHE STONES.—Fig. 32.

No. 1—Willoughby Creek..	10c. each, \$1.00 per doz.
No. 2—White Mountain..	10c. each, \$1.00 per doz.
No. 3—Green Mountain.....	8c. each, 75c. per doz.
No. 4—Indian Pond, No. 2 (red end,	5c. each, 50c. per doz.
No. 5—Mowing Machine (beveled).....	10c.
No. 6—Darby Creek.....	10c. each, \$1.00 doz.
Cigar Emery.....	10c. each, \$1.00 doz.
No. 7—Imported English Talacre.....	20c. each.

None genuine unless labeled Sir Pyers Mostyn, Talacre Quarries.

(Source: *The Raymond Terrace Examiner (NSW)*, 26 Mar 1920, page 3)

In Australia during 1923, an advert for E.P. Capper & Sons, West Maitland, states:

“We have just landed a shipment of the following lines... [including] Talacre Scythe Stones...”

(Source: *The Maitland Daily Mercury (NSW)*, 10 Apr 1923, page 5)

Nothing definitive was found regarding when the production of Talacre scythe stones ended, but these stones were still being advertised in Australia in 1939:

SCYTHE BLADES at 9/6 each
 Quality SCYTHE HANDLES at 8/11 each
 Kelly Reliable AXES at 8/6 each
 Talacre SCYTHE STONES at 2/3 each

(Source: *The Raymond Terrace Examiner (NSW)*, 2 Nov 1939, page 3)

Geology

In 1839, the Talacre and Gwespys sandstone was said to be at a depth of “30 to 45 feet, the upper level is a scythe-stone grit, then shale, etc., and below, a freestone bed...”

(Source: *The Civil Engineer and Architect's Journal*, London, October 1839, page 377)

A book from 1842 describes the Talacre stone as being "silicious sandstone with an argillo silicious cement... is worked with great ease and being remarkably free from hard untractable veins and soft places is capable of a very smooth surface..."

(Source: *The parliamentary gazetteer of England and Wales*, 1842, p. 277, TAD to TAL)

A good source for details about the geology of these sandstone formations is the Welsh Stone Forum (Fforwm Cerrig Cymru). Their newsletter from March 2009 includes a section on The Upper Carboniferous sandstones of north-east Wales. Their description for the Gwespys Sandstone (Talacre Stone) calls it “thickly bedded, generally brown and buff coloured, fine-grained feldspathic sandstones, which are locally up to 5m thick.”

(Source: *Welsh Stone Forum Newsletter*, No. 6, March 2009)

Locations and Maps

A number of quarries are shown around Talacre and Gwespys on these two Ordnance Survey maps (revised 1910, published 1915):

Flintshire II.NW (includes: Llanasa; Prestatyn.)
Flintshire II.SW (includes: Diserth; Gwaunysgor; Llanasa; Newmarket; Prestatyn.)

These maps are available for viewing online (and can be downloaded at no cost) from the National Library of Scotland (maps.nls.uk).

According to the Wikipedia entry for Gwespys, all of the quarries in the area are now defunct except for one



that's owned by Delyn Metals. One of the former quarries in Gwespys is now the site of a playground with a basketball hoop (photo from 2015 below).



Photo by Gary Rogers. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>



Conclusion

After all this online research, the burning question is whether it's still feasible to produce decent scythe stones from the sandstone that remains around Gwespys and Talacre.

Further research may be warranted, as they say (the kind of research that can't be done on a computer).

About the writer:

Although Steve hails from America, he probably should join SABI since he qualifies as Irish, and his wife and kids are British.



Summer and Winter Scything in Sussex

By
Colin Close

Around the fifteenth of July last year I answered a request for mowers at a field in Woodmancote in West Sussex. I'd recently attended the Scything Festival at Mulcheny Lakes where I'd attempted to compete for the first time...and sadly did not qualify. Determined to do better in 2017 I thought perhaps some practice would be in order. Little did I know that this would be the start of a scything obsession that was to last through summer, autumn and winter!

Marie-Angel has access to about 5 acres of grassland at Woodmancote at the foot of the south downs on which she grazes three horses. This grassland had been unmaintained for the last seven years and was in a sorry state with bramble encroaching into the open areas. There was one section (about two acres) however that was reasonably ok having been harrowed the year before. Marie-Angel wished to cut an acre of this to provide fodder for the horses during the the winter months this was paying work so practice and pay went hand in hand an ideal



combination.

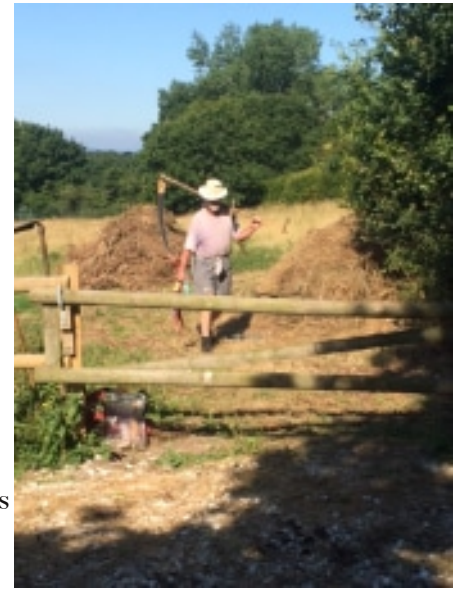
So in true scyther tradition I was up bleary eyed at five and off the to field to start cutting the first acre which we had paced out earlier and cut marker rows. Estimates showed that an acre would be around 67 paces square. That square looked awfully big and knowing how long it had taken us to cut the marker swathes I was starting to wonder whether the stuff that I had read about scythers



of old cutting an acre a day were somewhat fanciful. Fortunately we had some help in the shape of Frank a hedgelayner (real job pilot trainer) and quite an expert with the scythe too. He asked me which blade I was using and I said a short one as there are many tussocks and so the first mornings cutting commenced. It took over a week to cut that acre with

Frank cutting about twice the area I did at any one session (he very soon started using his long blade); his technique was slow and steady, mine, frenzied but it didn't seem to matter how manic I got he always cut more than me in the session.

I'd done a course at the Green Fair (even though I had been using a scythe for over ten years) and thought that I had things fairly well sorted. Alas this was



patently not so!

Eventually the first acre was finished and the hayrick team moved in and rick building began in earnest. It is a wonderfully social pastime rick building. It has everything you need to enjoy a sunny summers day..a little exercise, a sense of achievement when a rick is completed and best of all the outdoor picnic when the work is done.

Frank, Marie and I started on a second, slightly larger acre. We continued cutting all the way through August.

In the end five ricks were built and there was still hay left over for bedding. With supplementary grazing



that hay has lasted the horses all winter.

I was not to discover the what was wrong with my technique though until late November. I had found the location very peaceful and the exercise very invigorating and so I continued to scythe each morning for a couple of hours. I and my trusty bush blade decimated large areas of bramble; a most satisfying business and come mid October another paddock area had been cleared and made suitable for grazing. By this time fitness had improved and although I hadn't moved to a full length blade I had purchased a ditching blade and was having moderate success with this on the tougher grass; at least I was until one day I was laying into some particularly tough tussocks and "crack".. H'mm sounds serious thought I and, sure enough, the snath had cracked across the adjustment holes; Oh well there's another

in the car. New snath and start trying to cut. It just wouldn't cut grass properly. Checked the edge, seemed ok; I usually set the blade by knowing the distance between the tang and the edge of the snath so checked that and it looked ok but when I looked the blade seemed to be at the wrong angle. What had happened of course was that the tang angle had opened out, basically I had bent it!! I consoled myself with the fact that the right muscles were developing and I might yet have some success in competition. How that blade was recovered is a whole other story but I am still using it today.

More brambles on the other side of the meadow were next, followed by a very tussocky, tangled area. The field has many natural springs and the grasses vary greatly depending on their proximity. The area I was cutting was very thickly covered and interspersed with small brambles and extremely hard work to cut even with a bush blade. It was here Frank's secret was revealed; It seems that I was neither sharp of mind nor of blade; was it just that the blade was blunt? The motions of sharpening were being gone through and the blade seemed to cut ok. Some years ago a retired cabinet maker showed my how to sharpen a chisel; he said basically raise a burr and then gently smooth it off. Nothing to lose.. So out with the coarse stone and soon had a nice burr a lick with the Bergenzer to break it off and... delight!.. swish, swish, oh why had I not seen this earlier!..swish, swish what joy! So much to learn. I stopped scything at the field in early December. Soon though I'll be starting again soon to get in trim for the Green Scythe Fair.

As for the hay it keeps amazingly well in small ricks. When I pulled some out of the last rick a few days ago it still smelled of the summer in that beautiful place.

Marie-Angel would love to run an informal haymaking event this coming summer at The Field if anyone is interested in a day of scything and rick building you would be most welcome. Food and Drink provided.

Seventh SABI Winter Meeting

The seventh winter meeting of the Scythe Association of Britain and Ireland was held in Norfolk on the last weekend in January 2017, kindly hosted by Richard Brown.

The main business meeting took place on Saturday afternoon (28th January). Subjects ranged from the boring necessities, such as the annual accounts, to free-ranging discussions on developing the new web site and how social media are working. The minutes of this meeting will be uploaded to the web site at some stage,

probably when it is relaunched in the new format.

At other times through the weekend we scythed a substantial area of reed on the small nature reserve opposite Richard's house, and compared notes on many aspects of scythes, such as equipment.

The next SABI meeting will be the AGM on Sat 10th June 2017, the eve of the Green Scythe Fair.

Chris Riley

Which ever way the wind doth blow
Some heart is glad to have it so;
Then blow it east, or blow it west,
The wind that blows, that wind is best.

C A Mason

A Trip to the Trim Haymaking Festival, Ireland

By

Michelle Laine

The annual Trim Haymaking Festival has been held in the town of Trim, Co. Meath since 1968. Aimed at promoting the cultural history of rural Ireland and Irish heritage it has many activities and competitions throughout the one day festival. The main event focuses on traditional hay making both by hand and by old-style machinery.

Last summer, Phil managed to squeeze in a trip to the festival. The festival organisers gave their British visitor a warm welcome – instead of a corner in which to pitch his tent, he was offered the relative luxury of a bed in a mocked up Gypsy Wagon.



The morning of the festival dawned wet and blowy. Unfortunately, the poor weather meant attendance was lower than usual but there was still a reasonable number of competitors for the Scythe Cutting Competition. This has its own unique organisation, different from competitions in the UK. Each competitor is allocated an area 16' x 20', which must be mown in 4 swaths, each swath being 4' wide. Competitors can not choose in which direction to mow – all start at the same end of the block.



Judging is based on time, accuracy and quality of cut. No points are added for times under seven minutes, whereas points are incrementally added for times over seven minutes. Mowers are scored on the accuracy of spacing and the neatness of their windrows, also on the quality of the cut left behind. As there is no advantage to mowing the plot faster than seven minutes, the scoring system tends to weight towards quality rather than out and out speed.



In 2016 the conditions were very difficult. It was raining fairly heavily during the competition, the grass was heavy, tangled and flattened by the wind. Usually, the winners will manage times under seven minutes. Last year, the fastest times were in the region of 9 – 10 minutes. Phil managed a respectable 4th place, for which he was awarded

both a cup and a medal. He was assured that they usually award a fourth place and had not just invented it for his benefit!



The majority of the competitors were using traditional Irish scythes. These have a much straighter snath than their British counterparts, which were often home-made. In practised hands they made a neat job of the challenging conditions. Phil mowed with a Austrian style scythe, which attracted much interest from the local competitors and organisers.

The only other visiting competitor, from Eastern Europe, was using a borrowed Euro style scythe with a metal snath. Some of the mowers were veterans of the competition, others had begun entering more recently.

The festival organisers, Pat Farrelly and John Marron among others, made Phil very welcome. They offered great hospitality, copious amounts of tea and cake and the kind of good Craic that you would expect in Ireland. All rounded off with a trip to the local pub to wash down the tea with some good Irish stout. This year's festival will be on 19th June, more information can be found at trimhaymakingfestival.com