
The Windrow

Newsletter of The Scythe Association of Britain and Ireland

No 10 May 2015



**A new face to watch out for
at this year's scything championship.**

IN THIS ISSUE

SABI news p. 2
New Equipment p.2
Events p. 3
Courses p.4

Patrick Whitefield p.5
Managing Grass Booklet p.5
Feedback on Rozsutec and
East European blades. p 6

SABI NEWS

Richard Brown, who hosted the Scythe Association winter gathering at Heacham on the Norfolk coast writes: I have attached photos of the first of a set of RSPB Leighton moss style nest 'boxes' I am constructing from reed cut by scythe at our SABI winter gathering last month. They are designed to persuade bearded tits to take up residence on the reserve should we be lucky enough to attract them in. I will also be building nest chambers in to some of the reed stacks with the hope of attracting Shelduck which were known to nest in straw stacks on farms near the coast here in days past.

It pleases me to be able to make these: it is like recycling the effort you all made to come to Heacham as not only did we meet and enjoy mowing, with the same time achieved habitat objectives of opening sections of the reed bed to make it more useful for wildlife, and produced reed as a by product to make nest boxes for same! Saving two birds with one scythe !!



EQUIPMENT

New Snaths

Schröckenfux have taken over manufacture of the adjustable wooden snaths from Martin Strub in Switzerland. They have sent me a sample size 2 for comments. It is the same basic design, with a few differences. The finish is much smoother, and the handgrips thinner and deeper in cross section and ~~splayed outwards more than~~ previously. There are no extra holes for the left hand grip, as we have requested, so I will remind them of this. I will be bringing it to the West Country Scythe Fair to see what other people think of it. (S.F.)

Scandinavian Blades

Charlie Quinnell will be selling Scandinavian style blades (very narrow blades that are not normally peened) at the West Country Scythe Fair, together with Norwegian "scythettes" and some Norwegian stones.

Demand for Cradles Growing

If anyone wants to and knows how to manufacture effective cradles for wheat mowing, I would be interested in buying a batch for resale.

Simon scythes@myphone.coop

Summer Smallholding / Hay Making Apprenticeships

From mid - June to end August we will be making hay by hand at the Dyfed Permaculture Farm Trust, SW Wales. Volunteers are welcome to stay and work with us. A great opportunity to experience hand farming. Food and basic accommodation provided, stays of 1 to 6 weeks.

See www.scythecymru.co.uk for more info or contact Phil Batten or Michelle Lainé 07813 464990, scythecymru@yahoo.co.uk.

Mini Apprenticeship - Dorset

There are still one or two opportunities for ten days or so scything, haymaking etc at Monkton Wyld Court, Dorset. You are instructed, fed, lodged and come away with a free scythe.

For more info ring Simon on 01297 561359 or email chapter7@tlio.org.uk

Masterclass at the West Country Scythe Festival

11-13 June, at Muchelney, Langport Somerset

The definitive course for

- mowers with some experience who want to perfect their skills;
- team leaders managing volunteers or staff;
- people who want to teach scythe use to others.

The teachers are Christiane Lechner, scythe and yoga teacher from Austria; Phil Batten master peener from Scythe Cymru, <http://scythecymru.co.uk/> and Steve Tomlin from Scytherspace <http://stevetomlincrafts.wordpress.com/scythes/>

The venue is at Thorney Lakes. Muchelney, near Langport <http://www.thorneylakes.co.uk/>

The cost is £165 for individuals, £190 for organizations. Meals are provided. Camping on site is available

For a programme and other information please see <http://www.theshcytheshop.co.uk/festival.html> To book, email Simon at chapter7@tlio.org.uk tel 01297 561359

Beginners' and Improvers' Course at the West Country Scythe Festival

Saturday 13 June, Muchelney, Langport Somerset

Supervised by Simon Fairlie, Christiane Lechner, Steve Tomlin and Phil Batten.

Scythe use, set up, sharpening and maintenance in the morning. A choice of workshops, including peening, grassland management, haymaking and English scythe use in the afternoon. Trainees are divided into two groups, beginners and improvers, Price: £50.

To book, email Simon at chapter7@tlio.org.uk tel 01297 5613

Training at the Eastern Counties Scythe Festival

On the first day of the Scything festival - Saturday 27 June 2015. Cost is £60 per person. The 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/>

The Eleventh West Country Scythe Festival and Green Fair



£5 ENTRY

—
KIDS
FREE

SUNDAY
14 JUNE



Community Haystack Walthamstow

The third annual Community Haystack event will take place on Walthamstow Marshes at Lammastide, 1 and 2 August (see photo above).

Saturday: scything workshops throughout the day with Clive leeke, followed by a picnic and public talk with invited guests about the history of land and the culture of commons.

Sunday; a scythe competition, and building a large community haystack, and 'bring your own picnic'.

A large area of the marshes will be dedicated to scything, and open to those who know how to scythe.

For more information visit www.h-a-y-s-t-a-c-k-s.net or e-mail Kathrin Böhm [kathrin\(a\)myvillages.org](mailto:kathrin(a)myvillages.org)

Scything and Cider Festival, Wakehurst Place, West Sussex 18th/19th July 2015

Hosted by the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, in association with Fantastic British Food Festival. Learning sessions for beginners and improvers, and a series of individual and team competitions. The emphasis is on fun, with a backdrop of food, drink and craft stalls, children's entertainment etc. Camping available.

Contact chris@pratensis.net for more info.

Transylvanian Hay Festival (9-16th August) Rhigsetra Haymaking Norway 9-12 July Kosení Scythe Camp, Czech Republic (First two weeks of July)

For info about the above please see Windrow 9. To request a copy, please email chapter7@tlio.org.uk

Trim Haymaking Festival Co Meath Ireland

Sunday 21 June 2015. Now in its 47th year this festival includes a mowing competition, and other events, including a "roll in the hay" competition where couples compete tasks tied together with hay rope.

<http://www.trimhaymakingfestival.com>

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

Parking and Camping on Site

SATURDAY 13 JUNE

Beginners' and improvers' scything instruction, plus workshops on peening, grassland management, haymaking etc.

Scythe Championship

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

More information: 01297 561359 chapter7@tlio.org.uk
www.thescytheshop.co.uk/festival.html ; <http://www.greenfair.org.uk>

Eighth Eastern Counties Scythe Festival

Wimpole, Herts 27-28 June

A fun weekend on the National Trust Wimpole Estate. The only event in the UK where you can compete in competitions varying from 5m x 5m right up to a quarter of an acre.

Demonstrations of blacksmithing, sheep shearing, greenwood working and other rural crafts.

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

For more information go to <http://sadeik.wordpress.com/walks/scything-festival/> or email Simon.Damant@nationaltrust.org.uk

Wimpole Practice Sessions

Wimpole Estate, Cambs SABI members are invited to join our informal mowings during June and July. We plan to meet on Tuesday evenings.

For information contact Jim McVittie dalefield@ntlworld.com

Wimpole Scything Course

On the first day of the Scything festival - Saturday 27 June 2015. See page 3



Team Mowing at Wimpole

TRAINING COURSES

* Teachers marked with an asterisk usually have scythes for sale.

For an English scythe course see Mark Allery. For a two day course including haymaking see Simon Fairlie.

Scotland

There are currently no scythe teachers in Scotland. To commission a course please contact Steve Tomlin. See next item

Steve Tomlin* – Cumbria

Learn to Mow with an Austrian Scythe: 30 May (full), 11 July, 5 Sept, 6 Sept 2015 - £80

See also below with Neil Diment.

More dates to be added throughout the summer, see his website.

stevetomlin8@gmail.com <https://stevetomlincrafts.wordpress.com/learn-to-scythe/>

Steve Tomlin* and Neil Diment – Co Durham

Learn to Mow with an Austrian Scythe, Friday 3rd July

An introductory course for beginners and improvers, to be held on the Demesne meadow, Barnard Castle, Co. Durham.

Course fee: £40 (A 50% subsidy on the full cost thanks to the Heart of Teesdale landscape partnership project's support.) Priority will be given to those prepared to offer a day's voluntary mowing in this and future years to help the 'Friends of the Demesne Meadow' achieve its aim of restoring the meadow.

To book contact neil@ndiment.co.uk t: 01833 638263

Andrea Gilpin - Powys

Day long courses for beginners and improvers at Wild Meadow, Presteigne, Powys:

Saturday 16 May; Saturday 6 June; Saturday 16 August £50.

Courses offered further afield.

hello@wildmeadow.co.uk www.wildmeadow.co.uk/scything-classes/
01544 267039

Philip Batten* - S Wales

Dyfed Permaculture Farm Trust, Carmarthenshire.

Introductory Scythe Courses: Saturday 23rd May (FULL), Saturday 4th July, Sunday 2nd August Wednesday 19th August. £50

Peening and Sharpening Workshops: Tuesday 14 April OR Saturday 11 July £40

NEW Tai Chi Mowing Workshop, Saturday 11 July - Sunday 12 July (can be combined with a peening workshop on 11 July) .£80-£100

07813 464990, scythemru@yahoo.co.uk, www.scythemru.co.uk

Alastair Inglis* Devon and S Wales

Sat 25 April, Peening Workshop at Lammas

Sat 2 May, Introduction to Scything at Lammas

Fri 22 May, Introduction to Scything, Schumacher College, (Schumacher Students Only)

Wed 27 May, Peening Workshop at Schumacher College, Dartington (Schumacher Students Only)

End of May (date TBC), Introduction to Scything at Trees for Health, Beeson, South Hams.

al.inglis@yahoo.co.uk

Kevin Austin* Cornwall

Skyegrove, Herodsfoot, Cornwall. Beginners Course, 20th June 2015 (10-4pm) - £65 (incl. light lunch)

Improvers Course, 12th September 2015 (10-4pm) - £65 (incl. light lunch)

kevin@skyegroveorganics.co.uk
www.skyegroveorganics.co.uk

Andi Rickard* - Somerset/Devon

(Reigning Ladies Champion) One day courses for beginners and improvers at Mower Meadow near Wellington on the Somerset / Devon border. Weds 13 May, Weds 20 May, Sun 31 May. Cost £50 per day inc. refreshments

Andi is also available to teach groups and individuals at your location in Somerset or neighbouring counties.

Email andirickard@me.com or call 0758 1239453

I will be giving mowing demonstrations and selling scythes at the Blackdowns Woodland and Countryside Fair on Saturday 4 July at Wrangway, just off the A38 and M5 west of Wellington.

See <http://www.woodbiz.co.uk/fp.php?id=1470> for details.

Simon Fairlie* - Dorset

Courses on scythe use, plus grassland management and haymaking, at Monkton Wyld Court, on the Dorset/Devon border.

Two day Saturday to Sunday afternoon, with introduction Friday evening. B and B or camping on site. Both days recommended, but you can choose to attend Saturday only (beginners), or Sunday only (improvers):

22-24 May 2014
10-12 July 2014
4-6 September 2014

For info: www.thescytheshop.co.uk or chapter7@tlio.org.uk; To book: www.monktonwyldcourt.co.uk/, or tel 01297 560342

Chris Riley N Dorset*

Available for scythe training in the Wessex area. I will be holding training days in Gloucestershire on 20th May, 20th June, 25th August, and 12th September. Dates of courses in S Somerset and Bristol TBA.

chris@pratensis.net 07719 691312

Clive Leeke* - Berks, Herts and London

For Flora Locale :

Introduction to Scything; Kington, Warwickshire; 7 July 2015; Scything for Improvers Stroud, 15 July and Hungerford 22 July.

info@floralocale.org for bookings.

Introduction to the Austrian Scythe; Earth Trust, Little Wittenham, Oxfordshire, 4 July.

naomi.douglas@earthtrust.org.uk for bookings.

Introduction to the Austrian Scythe; Lammas Haymaking Festival, Walthamstow Marshes; 1 or 2 August.

ghoddinott@leevalleypark.org.uk or 020 8988 7565 for bookings.

Contact Clive at clive@austrianscythes.co.uk www.austrianscythes.co.uk/

Mark Allery*, W Sussex/Surrey

Sat 16th May and Sat 11th July - Learn to Mow with a Scythe - Weald and Downland Open Air Museum, Chichester, W Sussex.

Sat 6th June and Tuesday 8th September - Learn to Mow with a Scythe - Transition Guildford/Surrey Wildlife Trust, Guildford.

Sunday 5th July (tbc) - learn to Mow with a Scythe - Mere Barn Meadow, Lynchmere (Nr Haslemere), W Sussex.

Sun 2nd August, New Course: Mowing with a Traditional English Scythe - Weald and Downland Open Air Museum, Chichester, West Sussex Includes access to the museum's collection of English Scythes.

Mark offers short introductory lessons for people when buying a scythe from him in Lynchmere at £20 for a one hour setup and introduction, and one-to-one sessions on a case by case basis.

For courses at the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum contact 01243 811021, www.wealddown.co.uk/learn/adult-learning/

For courses at Transition Guildford contact John Bannister on 01483 570468 or Mark@woodlandantics.com or on 01428 641708 or via <http://woodlandantics.wordpress.com>.

For the course in Lynchmere, West Sussex please contact Mark directly.

For the Masterclass, Beginners and Improvers courses at the West Country Scythe Fair, and the Beginners course at the Eastern Counties Festival, see page 2.

Beth Tilston* - E Sussex

Courses for individuals and for organisations.

Beginners courses: Saturday 23rd May 2015 and Saturday 20th June 2015.

Contact me (via my website) if you're an organisation who would like me to come to you to teach you scything.

www.learnscything.com

Brighton*

Two day course with tutors: Simon Fairlie, Stefan Gehrels 22-23 August, Cost: £80-£200 (depending on income)

Brighton Permaculture Trust, Stanmer Park, Brighton BN1 9PZ www.brightonpermaculture.org.uk

Chris Riley* in Suffolk

Beginner's course at Assington Mill near Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 5LZ on Sunday 7th June 2015

Book via <http://www.assingtonmill.com/courses/2015/06/07/scything-beginners> or for info contact chris@pratensis.net 07719 691312

Simon Lamb – Suffolk

Learn to scythe. Saturday 4th July 2015, 10am - 4/4.30 pm, Fee: £65 per person

Venue: Ling's Meadow, Stanton Road Farm, Hepworth, IP22 2PR ,

01359 250594, info@lingsmeadow.co.uk, <http://lingsmeadow.co.uk/blog/2015/01/12/learn-to-scythe/>

Richard Brown* - Norfolk

Botanist, ecologist and seedsman offers scythe courses and tuition by arrangement and sells scythes.

Scythe course for beginners and improvers. Saturday 16th May 2015. Oxburgh Hall (NT), Norfolk. Cost £60

richardjbrown556@gmail.com

Nigel Adams: Bucks

Learn how to scythe. Saturday 6 June 2015 10:00 to 16:00: Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve, near Stokenchurch, off A40. £55

To book email njackson@chiltern-saonb.org ; 01844 355523



Patrick Whitefield, the renowned author and permaculture expert died on February 27. He was a keen scythe advocate. The photo on the left shows an introductory scythe course, tutored by Kevin Austin — part of a 16 day permaculture course in Southern Spain run by Patrick last year. An obituary of Patrick will appear in the summer issue of *The Land* magazine.

New Edition of *Managing Grass in Britain with the Scythe*

This useful and attractive booklet has been republished, increasing from 44 pages to 60, and with 42 mostly colour illustrations. The following is taken from the Chapter on “Progressive Haymaking”.

Britain’s climate is ideal for growing grass, but not for making hay. Many readers will have experienced the anxiety and stress of getting hay under cover within a precarious four day window in a wet summer — especially people dependent upon contractors who also have other people’s hay to make.

Haymaking may have become a more stressful operation in recent years. Contemporary accounts from the 17th, 18th and 19th century are sanguine about the weather, usually noting only that “grass should, as much as possible, be protected against rain and dew by cocking”. Since there were no meteorological weather forecasts, rain was hard to predict and avoid, and haymakers accepted the fact and got on with the job. Gangs of migrant Irishmen who made the hay on English farms in the 19th century contracted to work for a prearranged period, and according to Alison Utley, did no work on Sundays, “whatever the weather”.

It seems that the modern ability to predict with some accuracy the arrival of rain increases the pressure to avoid it, and since there are summers when it rains most of the time, this actually makes the business of deciding when to mow more stressful. On top of this, the scale, speed and expense of modern machinery is such that farmers are inclined to carry out all their haymaking in one fell swoop, making a poor decision in respect of the weather a costly one.

Managing Grass in Britain with the Scythe



by Simon Fairlie

The result is that many farmers tend to wait until there is a four or five day period of guaranteed fine weather, and in some summers this may not occur until late July or even August — by which time the hay has lost most of its goodness. The temptation is always to wait a few more days to see if the weather will improve — and then a few days more and so on until a month or six weeks has passed by. But hay mown a month too late will be of far worse quality than hay that has been tended through a couple of showery days.

One alternative is to make your hay bit by bit throughout the summer from May until September — cutting a patch whenever the weather outlook is reasonable for the next day or two. You can negotiate rain simply by raking the hay into windrows and cocks, which is what most people did before the 20th century. However, if you use hayracks, you have a much higher chance of ensuring your hay doesn’t get rained on at all. Two days without rain is usually enough to mow, make and rack hay. Statistically the most likely weather on any day in the UK is what you had yesterday, so mowing on any fine day is therefore a good bet. Even if rain does come, only a small percentage of your total hay crop is affected.

The book is available from the author, Simon Fairlie, for £6 including postage, or £3 if you are a SABI member. Send a cheque, made out to Simon Fairlie, or cash in envelope, to Monkton Wyld Court, Charmouth, Bridport DT6 6DQ. (Scythe distributors will be sent a copy free of charge.)

Feedback on East European Stones and Blades

Since the last issue of *The Windrow* came out we have received confirmation of the death of Lubomir Krivos, who quarried and manufactured Rozsutec whetstones. Peter Vido, who knows more than anyone in this country about the global scythe industry, has sent us a letter, from which the following is extracted.

Congratulations on the splendid issue of the *Windrow* — something that I once had hoped would materialize a decade ago and s be represented by an 'international version' thereof. Ah, but at least you Brits have gotten your shit together, in some respects.

On my first very quick reading of it, there was one communicated notion, and one 'fact' that both call for feedback, in my view.

Rozsutec Stones

The 'notion' was penned by you: "mowers, woodworkers and others who use Rozsutecs need to impress upon the Slovakian government that this is a resource of international importance which needs to be safeguarded."

As you know, I was the one to draw attention to that stone in the Western circles, had visited Lubomir a number of times, and understand the 'economic dilemma' of the stone's future. What you may or may not know is that this stone's deposit extends to other neighbouring properties and that, since the privatization, TONS of it have already been sold by respective entrepreneur land owners as slabs for patios, lower house wall covers etc. Lubomir had tried to put a stop to it by appealing to the reps of ministries of environment etc though as far as I know it fell, unsurprisingly, on deaf ears., because it is (mostly) money that talks.

You may now know that he has since departed for the 'heavenly pastures' and his son took over. But in the process the enterprise came to the attention of the authorities, who (instead of helping to "safeguard" it as you suggest) nearly caused an immediate shut down. Namely, they woke up to the fact that someone is making money off the stone deposits and, the mineral rights are the government's to sell, if they wish, and at the price they decide. Consequently, the stones now became slimmer and their price has more than doubled, because the younger generation has not been trained to "work for nothing".

As for how long Krivos junior will continue to make the whetstones is quite up in the air, as I see it, though on the other hand it may actually be a straightforward matter. If he receives what he considers a fair amount for his one man enterprise efforts he will continue, and even could readily find helpers within a few kilometres of where he lives and expand its efficiency, possibly making the stones at least hold their present cost. If the stone production were as lucrative as the mail order of scythes (and Rozsutec stones) can be in the West, there are good chances he'd stay at home and continue.

At this point I see two possible courses of actions. One is to increase the interest in the stone dramatically — by exactly the info you provided in the *Windrow* (except that it still reaches too small an audience, and this may be less easy now, given the stone's price hike).

The other is to talk every mail order scythe seller to commit to either continue selling it at the former price or take a portion, or even — for sake of the cause — the whole profit of selling it, and send the money to some fund from where it would be transferred to the maker.

EDITORS NOTE As Peter Vido points out, the ex-works price of Rozsutec stones has more than doubled since Lubomir's son took over. The retail price has gone up from £5 to £9, which remains cheaper than Mailander and Silicar stones. As well as being distributed to scythe teachers, these stones are also sold to woodworkers

Russian and Slovenian Blades

The other of *Windrow's* glitches that caught my attention was the 'fact' (in the feature on Kosenka) concerning blades made in former Yugoslavia and the USSR. The article stated: "as the steel is considered of inferior quality and less hardened, these blades wear out twice as quickly."

That is simply nonsense. I'm quite familiar with both of the makes of blades referring in that article. If anything, every sea-



A lesson well learned: Peter Vido teaching sharpening at the first West Country Scythe Festival, 2005, to beginners including Phil Batten (far left), currently Eastern Counties champion.

soned mower in my homeland knew that Russian blades are trickier to peen than most, but certainly not because they are 'soft'. I suspect it is partially due to the specific steel alloy that was chosen for their production and the steel being less 'homogenized' through the less actual forging it undergoes, but also because of the final (factory-chosen) hardness. The managers at Arti, the Russian factory, could have kept the Rc (hardness measured on the Rockwell scale) down, and they'd likely be easier to peen, and get ready for work initially. But they did not choose to do so. I know (as a results of hardness tests done on them in Austria) that, at 48 Rc, they are notably harder than Austrian blades of today. The "Profisense" blades are likely closer to 44 than 45 Rc. Schrockenfux could easily temper that steel to the equivalent of the Russian blades, of course. Why don't they? Well, for two reasons: the "Richters" (the highly skilled workers who test and fine tune the nearly finished blades with a hammer and anvil) would have a harder job fine-tuning them, and the edges would tear or crack more while being peened. The Russians do not need to be concerned with any of this because their fine-tuning is minimal and they don't feel obliged to prepare the edges in the factory.

In any case, I never heard from anyone in former Czechoslovakia, where for 40 years the Russian blades were the standard, that they were "less hardened" and therefore would wear too fast.

The Slovenian (Tovarna Kos i Srpov) blades are as nice as any to peen. Unfortunately, the overall workmanship has degenerated notably between when I first visited the factory (in 1999) and last time (in 2010) and I perceived the gradual change during visits in-between. Those blades have all along been made of ("partially recycled") Slovenian steel, which is "home-sourced". The Austrian blades are made of (equally vague "partially recycled") steel which is out-sourced (in Germany at this point). But source in itself makes only so much difference, especially today, when it is all partially 'international steel'. My point here is that there is unlikely to be ANY steel out there now used for scythe blade production that would have the blades made of it wear out twice as fast (provided the same maintenance method is used). Not even close!

I've never noticed any difference in this regard and always felt that the Slovenian steel was actually very nice. They seem to deliberately leave it with a softer temper, likely for the already mentioned difference in the ease of working during the follow-up steps. (We've tested some samples that I brought to Rossleithen to be,, as low as 40-42 Rc, or even less in spots.) However I subsequently used those very same blades here on the farm, and they did harden up after just couple of peenings and stood up to the work as well as contemporary Austrian blades, certainly NOT wearing "twice as fast".

Both the Russian and the Slovenian blades can, in some circumstances, be a better buy. The *Windrow* may be doing disservice to the Russian and Slovenian blade makers -- which is unjust and unnecessary.

EDITOR'S NOTES

The article on Kosenka called the Eastern European blade in question "Slovakian". It should have read "Slovenian". Slovakia has never had a scythe industry. This mistake was my fault.

I have a vintage Slovenian ditch blade, given to me by Peter Vido ten years ago, and I agree that it is a bit softer, and easy to peen. It is also well designed for the job, with a pronounced beard that helps to sever stout weeds with little stress to the blade.

This is a truncated and slightly edited version of Peter Vido's letter. A full version is available on request. SF