

# *The Windrow*

*Windrow No 18 March 2023*

Newsletter of The Scythe Association of Britain and Ireland



A man and his scythe in Wicklow, 1939.

Credit University College Dublin

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# SABI NEWS



## International Peening Day

International Peening Day this year comes on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> April (The first Sunday in April).

This is an 'everywhere-event' — It's purpose? To remind us all to ready our scythes in advance of the coming mowing season and support each other by joining together in this shared activity.

If you can't make it to an event (hopefully there is one near you) then you can share your experiences online via the SABI Facebook or email groups.

There are a selection of events being held around the country here are some of them.

### *East Anglia, Norfolk*

Richard Brown is running a day in Norfolk and says... "I will be hosting a gathering in my home meadow and workshop here in Norfolk. You are welcome to drop in anytime from 10am to 4pm for a bit of peening practices and advice, and a chance to test the results on the meadows new spring growth. I am also guessing that some of you will have some blades that were put away at the end of last season without any protective oil and forgotten?"

Peening is a mysterious and elusive art, and can lead to some fairly obsessive and compulsive behaviour All happening at:-

Lovells Hall, 30 Station Road , Terrington St Clement Norfolk PE34 4PL.

There's a map here: <https://wildscythe.co.uk/contact/>

### *South West, Somerset.*

Andi Rickard is running a drop-in peening workshop at Somerset Scythe School 11am - 4pm.

Mower Meadow, TA20 3RF

Come and ready your blades for the season ahead - free assistance and guidance available. Tea, coffee and CAKE!

### *Wales,*

*Newchapel, Llanidloes, Powys*

2nd April 2023, Peening Day: (Free)



Get your scything kit up to scratch with us, we'll cover tool care and maintenance, scythe blade peening and sharpening. Drop in anytime between 10:30 am and 3pm. Booking essential.

### *North West, Lancashire*

Peter Blackwell is hosting an open event 10am-4pm at Bell Sykes Farm (BB7 3AQ 07530807836 peter687@gmail.com).

Peening and Scythe workshop. Get ready for the new season brews provided, bring your own food, cake donations welcome.

### *West Midlands, Shropshire Hills*

Simon Cooter will be running a peening workshop at The Stiperstones national nature reserve on Sun 2 April from 10am-1pm..

Learn the traditional method of sharpening your scythe with Senior Reserve Manager and keen scyther. Drop in to the NNR base anytime between 10am and 1pm (booking is not necessary).

## Equipment News.....

### Sharpening Stones

Sadly, Ligato Fratelli, of the Pradalunga region in Italy, closed in 2022. Availability of the following stones will be affected - La Pradalunga, Mailander, La Bergamasca.

Falci Italia have sourced a replacement for the La Bergamasca, it is at the coarse end of natural stones and not suitable for general field mowing use.

Schröckenfux are offering a natural stone from Upper Austria as a replacement for Mailander. Whilst the stone is well made and of good quality, it is expensive and UK

wholesalers will not be stocking it as yet.

It's possible that stocks of Mailander will at least temporarily return. Schröckenfux have brought the entire stock of Ligato Fratelli, which amounts to 1,000's of stones! However, they are in muddled heaps in Italy and it will be a major task to go down to sort and collect them.

There could be several years supply of Mailanders but it is unlikely that they will be available this spring.

Judging by the mixed box we were shown at the factory, I think the task of sorting them is immense! There may



be some gems in there, including stones dating well back into the history of Ligato Fratelli's production, but there are also a fair number of stones of no practical scything use.

Natural stones currently generally available in the UK are La Saurat and Rozutec. We are looking at a promising stone from Sweden, sourced by Jenny Nilsson. There is still a gap for a hard stone that is slightly less fine than the ultra-fine Rozutec.

### Size 5 Snath

Schröckenfux have a size 5 snath in production. It must be 180cm long. There are no plans to stock them in the

UK, but it would be interesting to hear if anyone has found a need for a snath longer than the size 4.

### Supply

We are hopeful that the major delays and difficulties in the supply chain of the last few years are behind us. Schröckenfux have assured us that production is back on time after the severe impact of the Covid years, and this seems to be the case. Even so, their production is at capacity and orders need to be placed well in advance.

They like the co-ordinated approach to ordering adopted by the UK market, and we will continue to do this to help ease the burden on their production.

## The International Scythe Retailers Group: A Report by *Michelle Laine*

In late 2022 Phil and I were approached by Christiane Laganda, Jenny Nilsson and Mats Rosengren to help them form an informal network of independent scythe retailers.

The initial zoom meeting was attended by Jenny Nilsson (Sweden), Christiane Laganda (Austria), Mats Rosengren (Sweden), Michelle Laine & Phil Batten (UK/Wales), Botan Anderson (US) and Alexander Vido (Canada).

The purpose of the network is primarily to:

- Support each other by exchanging experience and information.
- Establish a positive working relationship with all suppliers of quality scythe equipment.
- Carry weight when dealing with issues or requests concerning said suppliers.



On the factory steps. Left to Right - Phil Batten, Jenny Nilsson, Michelle Laine, Toni Baudinger, Mr Dietmar Baudinger, Klaus Perthmayr, Christiane Laganda and Mats Rosengren



By speaking as a group we represent a significant section of the world's market for scythe equipment. This gives us greater sway when talking to manufacturers and we can work together to try and halt the recent trends of closures or lowering product quality.

Following the initial zoom meeting we sent out an invitation to world wide retailers who sell significant numbers of quality tools and the knowledge on how to use them. The network now has 23 members from across Europe, North America, Australasia and South Africa. Simon Fairlie, Richard Brown, Steve Tomlin and ourselves are UK members. Christopher Hayes and Neil Foulkes are Irish members.

It is amazingly supportive to be able to "talk shop" with other professionals in our rather niche speciality. The zoom meetings are interesting, informative and hard to keep short, as we all have so much to share!

### Visit to Schröckenfux Scythe Factory in Austria



The original factory buildings and the water that once powered the hammers. The water now runs a small hydroelectric plant, supplying electricity to the newer factory lower down the hill.

One of the early priorities for the group was to set up a cordial working relationship with the Schröckenfux scythe factory in Austria. Schröckenfux (SF) are one of only two premium scythe manufactures left in Europe and as such are of pivotal importance to all our members. Roßleithen, where the factory is located, has been a site of scythe manufacture for over 475 years!

Following group discussions on the issues we would like to raise with them, we sent a letter requesting a

meeting and a date was arranged for early December 2022. Jenny Nilsson, Mats Rosengren, Christiane Laganda, Phil and myself were the representatives of the International Scythe Retailers Group.

### Travel and Meeting New Friends

Those of us who do not live in Austria opted to make the journey by train. Rail strikes in Austria on the day of travel meant our night trains were cancelled. We still managed to make it across Europe in time, though Mats got much less sleep than he was expecting!

On the first day we enjoyed meeting face to face with our European colleagues. We already knew Christiane from her visits to the Somerset Scythe Festival, but this was the first time we had met Jenny and Mats in person. Zoom is a wonderful thing but not the same as a face to face chat! There was hours of scythe and meadow chat, comparisons of the growing scythe markets in Sweden and the UK and general enjoyment of each others company.

In the afternoon we travelled to Windischgarsten and met Gerhard Wagner, the retired production manager

of Schröckenfux, for dinner. It was good to hear stories of his time with SF and his meetings with Peter Vido, and ask questions of his vast knowledge of scythe blade manufacture. He has fond memories of visiting the Somerset Scythe Festival in its early years.

### Schröckenfux Scythe Factory

The following day was spent at the scythe factory. In the morning we toured the production, which left



us with an increased awe of the work the factory does. There is a large amount of skilled hand work. Each blade has passed through the hands of around 24 workers before it leaves the factory!

In the afternoon we had a meeting with Mr Dietmar Baudinger, owner of Schröckenfux, his son Toni Baudinger, Klaus Perthmayr, the current production manager and Silvia Eggl. We were made very welcome and had a constructive meeting about the strong future of the scythe.



In the paint room. Coincidentally, these were Profisense blades that were destined for delivery to Scythe Cymru!



Hot forging. A power hammer being used to draw out a scythe blade



Later in the process, peening the edges of the scythe blades.



Walking above Roßleithen with Gerhard Wagner (on the right)

supplying retailers like us who can share the knowledge on how to use their quality tools alongside sales.





Stunning Gleinkersee

During the meeting were able to show our appreciation for the factory, the products and the work they do. We raised some issues from the International Scythe Retailers Group and had constructive discussions on how to move forward. Production is nearing capacity and there is continuing dialogue between SF and the Scythe Retailers Group about ways we can work together to support quality and ease pressure on the production and the workers. Items under discussion include setting an agreed tang angle standard and looking at the length intervals blades are produced in, to see if we can make a reduction.

### **Snow on the Mountains**

We finished our trip with a kind invitation from Gerhard to visit him the following day at his home in the mountains above Roßleithen. There was plenty more scythe chat, a beautiful and refreshing walk around nearby Lake Gleinkersee, views of snowy mountains and a delicious Goulash cooked by Gerhard for lunch.

We travelled back to Linz for the evening where we met Ada Höchtl, a newer entrant to the scythe training and retailing market. In the Christmas

market we were highly amused by miniature scythes, hay rakes and grinding wheels that you can buy to adorn your Nativity scene.

The Swedish and UK contingents left to catch night trains back towards our respective homes. After a day of sightseeing in Paris, Phil and I arrived back in Wales exhausted but exhilarated by our trip. We are very grateful to Phil's sister and her partner who house, animal and family sat for us, allowing us the rare treat of leaving the farm together.

### **The Scythe Instructors Forum**

If you work with the scythe and are interested in getting involved in discussion with people from around the world, consider joining the Scythe Instructors Forum.

It is primarily Facebook based, with occasional zoom meetings to discuss topics of interest. If you do not use Facebook but would be interested in joining zoom meetings, please do send me an email and I can notify you of when they are happening.

# SCYTHING EVENTS

## *Green Scythe Fair*

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> June 2023

Incorporating the 17th West Country Scythe Festival  
The biggest and best scythe event in the country.

Scythe championship, scythe and haymaking events, crafts, stalls, music, speakers, kids area, local food and drink. For more up-to-date information see [www.greenfair.org.uk](http://www.greenfair.org.uk)

## *Scottish Scything Festival*

Weekend of Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> June 2023

Blackhaugh Community Farm, Perthshire

This farm based event with camping, talks, scythe sales, practice areas and of course the competition event. It is hoped that we can encourage some musicians to come along to provide entertainment of the Saturday evening and we are looking into the possibility of running an improvers workshop on Friday the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

## *Northern Scythe Festival*

Sat-Sun 1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2023' Bell Sykes Farm, Slaidburn

With the kind permission of Peter and Lin Blackwell

Saturday: Scything practice; Have a go sessions; Scythe clinic; Peening demonstration

Sunday: Team mow; Further practice; Northern scything championship

Basic camping is available from Friday night (£10 per person per night). To book contact Jim McVittie ([jim@mcvittie.me.uk](mailto:jim@mcvittie.me.uk))

Peter's meadows are some of the nicest to mow so this event is one not to miss. .

## *The Shropshire Hills Hay Meadow Festival*

Sat 15<sup>th</sup> July 2023 11am -6pm at the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre, Craven Arms

A fun filled family day to celebrate wildflower meadows and their wildlife. Walks, talks, scything, music, crafts and much more. See the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre for more details and early bird tickets. (see poster)

For more information contact Simon Cooter ([simon.cooter@naturalengland.org](mailto:simon.cooter@naturalengland.org))

A FUN FILLED FAMILY DAY  
AT THE  
SHROPSHIRE HILLS DISCOVERY CENTRE  
TO CELEBRATE  
WILDFLOWER MEADOWS &  
THEIR WEALTH OF WILDLIFE

**Hay MEADOW FESTIVAL 2023**

**SAT 15TH JULY**  
**11AM Till 7PM**  
INCLUDING:  
SCYTHING COMPETITIONS / HAVE A GO  
WILDLIFE DISCOVERY ACTIVITIES  
RURAL ARTS & CRAFTS  
ECO TALK TENT  
MUSIC, MERRIMENT & REFRESHMENT

Tickets available in advance from the Discovery Centre. please call: 01588 676060

In advance : £7.00 adults; £3.00 Children; £17.00 family  
On the day: £8.00 adults; £4.00 children; £20.00 family.  
Under 5's free

Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre  
The Home of Grow Cook Learn  
CRAVEN ARMS - SY7 9RS  
Tel 01588 676060  
Green Recovery Challenge Fund

[www.shropshirehillsdiscoverycentre.co.uk](http://www.shropshirehillsdiscoverycentre.co.uk)



# The 17th West Country Scythe Festival *and* Green Fair

**SUNDAY  
11 JUNE 2023**

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

## **SCYTHER CHAMPIONSHIP**

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

Tickets £15  
Concessions for people  
coming by bike or bus  
Available at  
[www.greenfair.org.uk](http://www.greenfair.org.uk)

Camping and Parking on Site  
Bus Service Provided

## **SCYTHER COURSES**

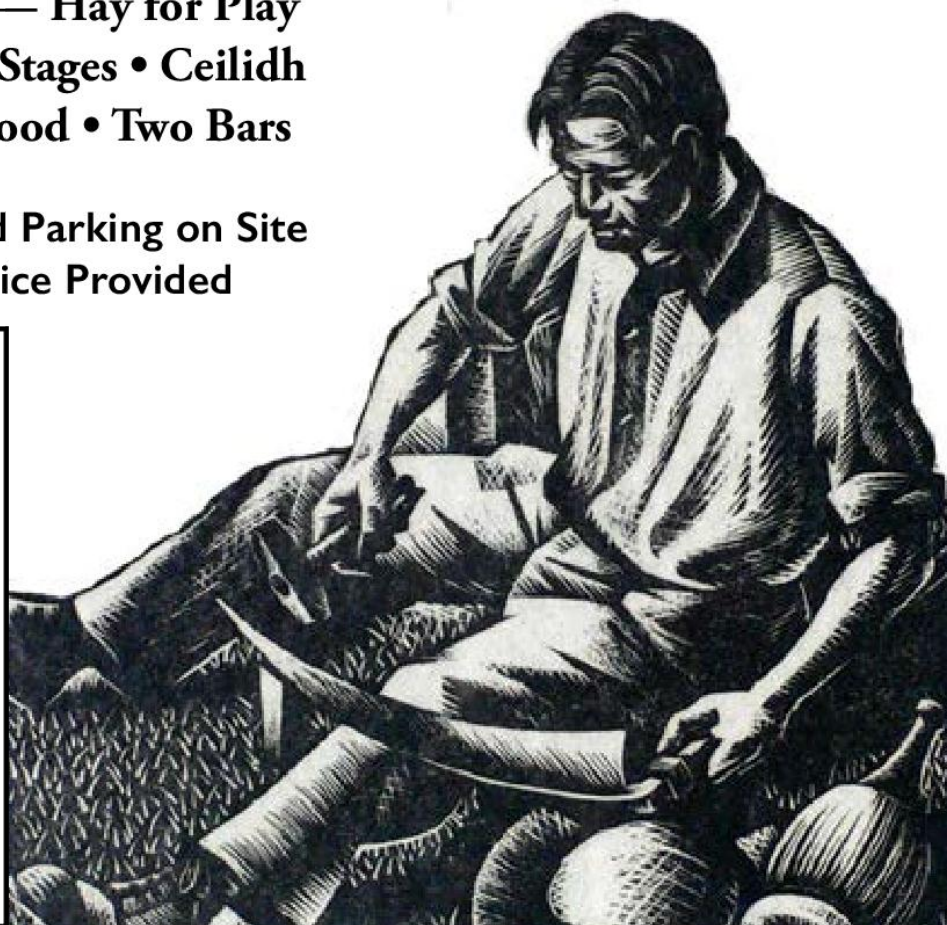
Improvers'  
Masterclass

9-10 June

Beginners' Course

10 June

plus workshops  
on the English scythe,  
grassland management  
and haymaking.



Book early because tickets sell out  
More information and booking : [www.greenfair.org.uk](http://www.greenfair.org.uk)



**Cambridge scything Festival**

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2023 10:00 - 15:00 at Wandlebury Country Park, CB22 3AE by kind permission of Cambridge Past, Present & Future. Scything Demonstrations, Team Mowing and Have-a-Go session.

Scythers can just turn up on the day and park in the pay and display visitor car park but anyone travelling some distance should contact Jim McVittie ([jim@mcvittie.me.uk](mailto:jim@mcvittie.me.uk))

**Scything with a View**

Tues 25<sup>th</sup> to Fri 28<sup>th</sup> July 10am - 2pm Free  
A week of scything on and around the Stiperstones. An opportunity to hone those scything skills, followed by a BBQ on the Friday. Scythers need to have carried out a scything course to attend.

**The Third Orcop Hill Scythe Festival**

Parrysfield, Orcop Hill, Hereford.  
Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> July 2023  
At least 4 chefs, Singing, Walking, Talking, Drinking, & of course everything to do with Scything in a 11year old meadow. Children very welcome - games  
Four days of scythe related activities in David's wildflower meadow. In 2022 Champion Scyther Peter Blackwell said this was "the best scything he had ever enjoyed".

Basic camping available with camp fires and shared food. Everyone participating gets a free commemorative mug.

To book contact David Kuegler ([david.kuegler@btinternet.com](mailto:david.kuegler@btinternet.com))

**Meadows and Kites Festival**

Friday 16<sup>th</sup> at 16:00 to 23:00 Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> June 2023, New Chapel, Llanidloes  
Join in with scything and hay-making fun at this year's festival, where you can make and fly your own kite. There will be food vans, music and a bar along with lots of activities for families.  
Camping available on request 16th - 19th June  
Please contact Hélène and Danny for more details [hand.powered@yahoo.com](mailto:hand.powered@yahoo.com)

**Kyle of Lochalsh Scything Festival**

Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> August 2022  
Kyle & Lochalsh Community Trust, The Plock, Kyle of Lochalsh IV40 8AZ  
The day will include scything experiences for absolute beginners and learners, an informal competition, peening practise, opportunity to learn about highland meadows, and lend a hand in grassland management. We are also hoping to have cut a grass maze.  
Contact Heather Beaton [heather.beaton@lochalsh.uk](mailto:heather.beaton@lochalsh.uk)

**Merlindale Scythe Festival**

Merlindale, near Peebles  
10<sup>th</sup> September 2022

There will be horse-drawn mowing as well as two scything 'have a go' sessions and opportunities to practice; various other environmental displays and organisations.

Contact John McLennan [jsmclennan@gmail.com](mailto:jsmclennan@gmail.com)

**Othona Scything Week**

Monday 26<sup>th</sup> June - Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2023  
The Othona Community, Bradwell-on-Sea, Essex, CM0 7PN

This week of scything offers a great opportunity to develop and practice your scything skills in the beautiful grounds and wild flower meadows of the Othona community on the Essex coast.

Through the week Claire White, an experienced scythe instructor & garden designer, and Jonny Aldridge, the resident Othona gardener and scythesman will be on hand to give advice and tuition when required. On Tuesday Richard Brown [wildscythe.co.uk](http://wildscythe.co.uk) will offer a formal one day workshop: "Getting the best results from your scythe through better technique and sharpening"  
Mowing in Othona's wild flower meadows alongside these practitioners will also give you insight and understanding into the creation and management of meadows and grassland.

For more details see

<https://www.othonaessex.org.uk/civicrm/event/info?id=2089>



# COURSE DIRECTORY

Teachers marked with an asterisk have scythes for sale.

## East Anglia

**Richard Brown,\* Norfolk.**

richard@wildscythe.co.uk

Website:- [www.wildscythe.co.uk](http://www.wildscythe.co.uk)

I offer courses and individual tuition in East Anglia and East Midlands. As an experienced Botanist, Ecologist and seedsman I can tailor courses to include both practical scythe instruction as well as meadow management theory. I sell scythes and offer fitting and peening services from my scythe workshop and meadow.

## Midlands

**Nicole Clough\* Oxfordshire.**

[www.joyofscything.uk](http://www.joyofscything.uk)

I provide training in the use, maintenance and joy of the Austrian scythe within Oxfordshire, the nearby counties and the southern Midlands.

Please visit my website for the 2023 venue dates or to enquire about arranging a bespoke session.

## Northern England

**Steve Tomlin\***

Bookings: [stevetomlin8@gmail.com](mailto:stevetomlin8@gmail.com)

[stevetomlin8crafts.wordpress.com/learn-to-scythe](http://stevetomlin8crafts.wordpress.com/learn-to-scythe)

Practical, fun courses covering all the skills to use and maintain your scythe. I have been teaching since 2010, am author of *Learn to Scythe* and sell scythe kits. I can travel to teach you at your venue.

- 9<sup>th</sup> June Bell Sykes Farm, Slaidburn, Lancs
- 17<sup>th</sup> June Brigflatts Meeting House, Sedburgh, Cumbria
- 23<sup>rd</sup> July, Bell Sykes Farm, Slaidburn, Lancs
- 4<sup>th</sup> Aug Broadrake, Chapel-le-Dale, Yorkshire

### Dales

- 10<sup>th</sup> Sept Foxglove Covert LNR, Ripon, North Yorkshire
- 6<sup>th</sup> Oct Peening workshop at Bell Sykes Farm, Slaidburn, Lancs

All £100/day

**Danny Hodgson & Helene Ducatroy\*,**

Llanidloes, Powys [handpowered@yahoo.com](mailto:handpowered@yahoo.com)

Join us for scything courses tailored to all abilities, providing group sessions, one-to-one tuition and contract mowing. Working throughout Mid-Wales and across the UK. See [www.handpowered.co.uk](http://www.handpowered.co.uk)

### Courses

- 28<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> or 30<sup>th</sup> July 2023 9:30 am-4 pm  
Regather farm, Sheffield, £70.00 per person per day.

Booking <http://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/learn-to-scythe-weekend-tickets-556967012327>

**John Grundy\* County Durham & Northumberland**

<https://www.wildernesstamed.com> covering

Northumberland and Durham and the borders.

Training groups and individuals from conservation charities, friends of groups and small holders. More information at <https://www.wildernesstamed.com/scything> Phone 07827958361 or email [contact@wildernesstamed.com](mailto:contact@wildernesstamed.com) to book your course.

## South East England

**Claire White\* Essex, London and East Anglia**

[clairwhitegardens@gmail.com](mailto:clairwhitegardens@gmail.com)

Scythe instructor and enthusiast. Offering one-to-one and group training in scythe practice.

**Clive Leeke\* Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and West London**

[hedgecraft@theoldfarmyard.co.uk](mailto:hedgecraft@theoldfarmyard.co.uk)

<https://www.theoldfarmyard.co.uk>

Ten years teaching experience since qualifying. Courses in scything and wildflower meadow management on my own meadow in South Oxon, or on your land by arrangement. Also now have a venue in Kent/Sussex area for a course around September time.

- Introduction to Scything; Saturday, 1<sup>st</sup> July 2023; price £85 per person Gallowstree Common, South Oxon;
- Other dates TBA

**Nicole Clough\* Oxfordshire.**

[www.joyofscything.uk](http://www.joyofscything.uk)

I provide training in the use, maintenance and joy of the Austrian scythe within Oxfordshire, the nearby counties and the southern Midlands.

Please visit my website for the 2023 venue dates or to enquire about arranging a bespoke session.

**Mary Ellis Kent, East Sussex**

Learn to scythe in a day on a course with others, or tailored 1 to 1 tuition in scything, sharpening and peening, in and around Kent and East Sussex. Learn the joy of an ancient skill. Please email [maryellis119@gmail.com](mailto:maryellis119@gmail.com). "I have never seen anyone pick up a scythe and not smile".

## South West England

**Andi Rickard\* Somerset**

[andirickard@me.com](mailto:andirickard@me.com) 07581 239453

Former UK Scything Champion and current Ladies Champion for 10 years. Eight years experience teaching scythe skills.

- Beginners and Improvers courses throughout the summer from April through to October.
- Group courses and private bookings.

Courses are held at Mower Meadow in South Somerset. (Camping available). I can also teach at your venue.

See [www.scytheschool.com](http://www.scytheschool.com) for more details and to book.

**Chris Riley\* North Dorset**

[chris@pratensis.net](mailto:chris@pratensis.net) 07719 691312

Available for scythe training in the Wessex area, and beyond.

For up-to-date information see: [www.pratensis.net](http://www.pratensis.net)  
Scything Workshops at Lords of the Manor Hotel (Glos) on Wed 16th Aug, Wed 30th Aug, Wed 13th Sep



2023. Go to [www.lordsofthemanor.com/scything-workshop](http://www.lordsofthemanor.com/scything-workshop) for further details, and to book.

**Simon Fairlie, Monkton Wylde Court, West Dorset, East Devon**

scythes@myphone.coop [www.thescytheshop.co.uk](http://www.thescytheshop.co.uk)  
<https://monktonwyldcourt.co.uk>

- Two day courses
- Scythe use, Haymaking and Grassland Management.
- 16<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> May 2023
- 12<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> September

Tutors: Simon Fairlie and Camilo Liarte & Jared Hills.  
 Friday evening to Sunday afternoon. Lunch is included.  
 Accommodation and other meals are available on site.

**Kevin Austin\* Cornwall**

Phone: 07943653825 email: [kevin@skyegrove.co.uk](mailto:kevin@skyegrove.co.uk)  
 For all your scything needs. training and equipment from an experienced instructor in the use and maintenance of the Austrian scythe.  
 Single, couples or groups, tailored for beginners or improvers.

- Courses on:-
- May 20<sup>th</sup> 2023
- May 27<sup>th</sup> 2023

See : [www.skyegrove.co.uk](http://www.skyegrove.co.uk) for arranged course dates.

**Adrian Thomas North Devon**

Phone: 01409 282801 email: [adrianthomas59@gmail.com](mailto:adrianthomas59@gmail.com)  
 Learn to scythe as an individual or in a group (max 6).  
 Volunteer groups (max 12)  
 Contact me to discuss further.  
 Location: Buckland Filleigh or your site.  
 Cost £65 per person  
 Dates : Arranged around your availability

**Ross Adams\* South Devon**

Email [ross@abundantgardens.uk](mailto:ross@abundantgardens.uk)  
 Website [www.abundantgardens.uk](http://www.abundantgardens.uk)  
 I run scything courses for beginners and improvers through the summer in the South Hams.

- June 3<sup>rd</sup> Foxhole community garden, Dartington
- July 8<sup>th</sup> The High Nature Centre, Salcombe
- Aug 5<sup>th</sup> Foxhole community garden, Dartington
- Sept 16<sup>th</sup> Foxhole community garden, Dartington

All courses £80.

I can provide course on your site for groups or 1:1.  
 Equipment is provided and available to purchase.

**Jeremy Weiss\*, South Devon**

I run courses for beginners and improvers on my smallholding near Totnes. I can also run courses on your land and I offer one to one tuition. You can find out more on my website: <https://properedges.com/courses/>

## Wales & Borders

**David Kuegler\* Hereford**

[david.kuegler@btinternet.com](mailto:david.kuegler@btinternet.com) <https://www.instagram.com/parrysfieldorcop/>  
 David has been teaching 10years & still learning.  
 Courses cover every imaginable type of situation, & Peening. Teaching the student to have the skills to teach themselves & others. Groups or 1:1 @ Parrysfield, Orcop or @ your venue. Supply fully prepared Scythe Kits, Oiled & Sharp(Peened).

- Beginners Scythe Courses: Parrysfield, Orcop Hill,

**Hereford HR28SD**

- Every Second Saturday April – September
- Special teaching & re-teaching 27th-30th July (3rd Year)
- Banks of River Severn, Worcester WR26LX, Scything Course/Event – a beautiful site, date tbc
- The Big Apple [www.bigapple.org.uk](http://www.bigapple.org.uk), scythe teaching for beginners & have a go! 7th & 8th October

**Simon Cooter\* Shropshire**

Tel: 01743 792294:

[Simon.Cooter@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:Simon.Cooter@naturalengland.org.uk)

Site manager for the Stiperstones National Nature Reserve.

Courses are run from the nature reserve base where you can practice on a variety of vegetation and slopes. All proceeds go to the management of the nature reserve.

- Introductory Scything and meadow management course, Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> July, 10am - 4pm. £60.00pp
- Introductory Scything and meadow management course, Monday 24<sup>th</sup> July, 10am - 4pm. £60.00pp (followed by optional free scything sessions all week)

**Phillip Batten\* Dyfed Permaculture Farm Trust, Carmarthenshire**

[info@scythecymru.co.uk](mailto:info@scythecymru.co.uk) or Phone 01559 371 485

Learn to scythe or improve your skills. Workshops give you - hands on experience; a chance to "try before you buy" or get your own scythe set up to give the it's best; visit a smallholding where the scythe is integral to the management and is used year round in a variety of situations.

- Introductory Courses:
- Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> June 2023 10am - 4pm
- See our website for additional 2023 dates.
- Peening and Sharpening Workshop
- Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> April 2023 10am - 4pm

**Danny Hodgson & Helene Ducrotoy, Llanidloes, hand.powered@yahoo.com**

Join us for scything courses tailored to all abilities, providing group sessions, one-to-one tuition and contract mowing. Working throughout Mid-Wales and across the UK, visit [www.handpowered.co.uk](http://www.handpowered.co.uk) for details.

- Scything course, 16th & 17th June 2023; Kite and Meadows festival, New Chapel, Llanidloes, free course for beginners and improvers
- 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> July 2023: Course in scything and meadow management. Newchapel, Llanidloes (£65 per person per day)
- 12th or 13th August 2023: Course in scything and meadow management. Newchapel, Llanidloes (£65 per person per day)

**Andrea Gilpin\*, Presteigne, Powys**

[hello@wildmeadow.co](mailto:hello@wildmeadow.co)

<https://www.wildmeadow.co/scything-classes>

Learn to scythe or improve your skills in 3 acres of meadows and orchards with a variety of terrain and vegetation type. equipment provided and available to purchase. 1:1 tuition also available. Meadow management advice given

- Learn to Scythe- Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> May - £70
- Learn to Scythe - Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> June - £70
- Learn to Scythe - Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> September - £70



**Beth Tilston\* Forest of Dean**

Flaxley, Forest of Dean: [bethtilston@googlemail.com](mailto:bethtilston@googlemail.com)  
<https://cloudcottageland.co.uk/scythe-courses-in-gloucestershire/>

Day long courses and one to ones with a teacher of 10+ years experience. Learn everything you need to get mowing, and buy a scythe while you are there.

One to ones available in Blakeney, Forest of Dean.

- 15<sup>th</sup> July Flaxley, Forest of Dean
- August TBA Flaxley, Forest of Dean
- 30 minute Pay What You Want online course available at <https://cloudcottageland.vhx.tv>

**Scotland****Rob Brodie, Fife**

[robmaculture@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:robmaculture@yahoo.co.uk),

Beginners scything workshops suitable for anyone interested in using a scythe to manage green spaces. Please email to arrange a workshop and for more information.

Visit <http://quietertimes.org> for more details and to see current workshop dates.

**Ireland****Neil Foulkes, Co Leitrim, Ireland**

[neilfoulkes62@gmail.com](mailto:neilfoulkes62@gmail.com)

Formal and informal workshops on mowing and scythe maintenance, including through local authorities. Mainly covering Northern Ireland and the border counties.

I also sell Austrian scythes and equipment.

**Susanne Raven, East Cork, Ireland**

[rowanlily@yahoo.de](mailto:rowanlily@yahoo.de)

While I don't teach courses, I do offer scythe mowing and peening services and I can provide information regarding scything in Ireland.

You're welcome to join the facebook group An Faobhar - Scythe Group at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/215248119929200>

For more information visit <http://www.susanneraven.ie>

**Chris Hayes, Wexford, Ireland [temujinhayes@gmail.com](mailto:temujinhayes@gmail.com)**

Scythe shop and course updates – <https://www.scythe.ie/>  
 Learned to scythe with Simon Fairlie in 2012 and have been teaching since 2014

- May 27<sup>th</sup>, July 15<sup>th</sup>, September 23<sup>rd</sup> <https://irishseedsavers.ie/workshops>
- June 10<sup>th</sup>, September 30<sup>th</sup> <https://cecas.ie/event/one-day-course-an-introduction-to-scything-at-cecas-10-june/>

**Online****Beth Tilston\* Forest of Dean**

A 30 minute online course <https://cloudcottageland.vhx.tv> Covers all I teach on my day course. Pay what you want – you decide what you pay.

**National**

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

**Steve Tomlin\* Manchester**

[stevetomlin8@gmail.com](mailto:stevetomlin8@gmail.com)

[stevetomlincrafts.wordpress.com/learn-to-scythe](http://stevetomlincrafts.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.

**Andi Ricard\* Somerset**

[andiricard@me.com](mailto:andiricard@me.com) 07581 239453

Former UK Scything Champion, Ladies Champion for 10 years. Eight years experience teaching scythe skills.

Sessions: 1-to-1 Couples or group bookings - at my venue or yours. Group courses at Mower Meadow, South Somerset monthly (from April 22<sup>nd</sup>) Camping available.

See [www.scytheschool.com](http://www.scytheschool.com) for more details and to apply.

**Andrea Gilpin\* Powys**

[hello@wildmeadow.co](mailto:hello@wildmeadow.co)

Courses across England and Wales for beginners and improvers.

I have enjoyed teaching since 2010 and I frequently travel to tutor groups in their own patch. Can include advice on meadow management. Clients include Wildlife Trusts, The National Trust, RSPB and many community groups.

**Danny Hodgson\*, Llanidloes, Powys & Sheffield South Yorkshire/ East-Midlands**

[danny\\_hodgson@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:danny_hodgson@hotmail.co.uk)

<https://www.handpowered.co.uk>

Scythe courses in Mid Wales, South Yorkshire and across the UK. Learn to scythe or improve your technique, I am happy to travel to you and cater for individuals and groups of all abilities and ages. Please visit my website for more details on courses and venues.

**David Kueglar\* Hereford**

[david.keuglar@btinternet.com](mailto:david.keuglar@btinternet.com) <https://www.instagram.com/parrysfieldorcop/>

Courses in England & Wales, including Snowdonia. I teach North-South Wales & England, for all sorts of community groups & Trusts. & Individuals too.

**Chris Riley\* North Dorset**

[chris@pratensis.net](mailto:chris@pratensis.net) 07719 691312

Experienced scythe trainer based in north Dorset. I mainly deliver beginners' courses in the Wessex area, but it can often also be feasible to go further afield. Scythes available for purchase. See web site for more information: [www.pratensis.net](http://www.pratensis.net)

# Scythe Courses at the West Country Scythe Fair

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

## INTRODUCTORY SCYTHER COURSE

Saturday 10 June 2023

Set up, sharpening and mowing technique in the morning. Peening in the afternoon, plus optional workshops on the English scythe, grassland management, and haymaking by hand.

Please arrive at 9:30. Course runs from 10am - 4pm: Please bring a packed lunch

The cost is £100 with a concession of £75 for the unwaged

Camping is available on site

To Book See: <https://www.greenfair.org.uk/scythe-info>



## IMPROVERS' MASTERCLASS

Friday 9 and Saturday 10 June 2023

A two day course for

- mowers with some experience who wish to develop their skills.
  - team leaders managing volunteers or staff.
- people who want to teach the use of the scythe.

**You'll have the personal attention of three of the most experienced teachers in the UK.**

**Phil Batten master peener and scythe competition winner from Scythe Cymru;**

**Andi Rickard of the Somerset Scythe School UK womens champion mower.**

**Kevin Austin scythe teacher from Cornwall and former UK champion mower.**

This course covers:- The correct set up of the tool, your mowing stance and style, sharpening, peening and repairing blades, teaching, organizing volunteers and novices. Optional workshops on the English scythe, grassland management and haymaking by hand.

The cost is £175 for individuals, £200 for organizations, £100 concession for unwaged.

Lunches are included. The price includes free entry to the fair on Sunday.

On site camping if required.

To Book See: <https://www.greenfair.org.uk/scythe-info>

For additional information: email [andirickard@me.com](mailto:andirickard@me.com)

The venue for both courses is at Thorney Lakes. Muchelney, near Langport

<http://www.thorneylakes.co.uk/>

You can find out more about the Green Scythe Fair at <https://www.greenfair.org.uk>



# The 'I' in SABI – We're Here!

By

*Susanne Raven*

How do we find our way in life? How did I find my way to Ireland? How did I find my way to the scythe? Interesting questions, but they're stories for another day. What matters right now is that I DID find my way in life (to the halfway mark anyway), to Ireland and to the scythe.

Having found the scythe, it didn't take me long to find SABI, thank google. I was amazed to find so much information and so many scythe tutors all over England, Scotland, Wales and... hold on! No entries for Ireland, alas. (This was back in 2019). Undeterred, I kept looking and, with help, found a scythe instructor not too far from where I live, right here in Ireland. Matthew Tull taught with great skill and enthusiasm and I'm grateful I got to meet him and learn from him before he sadly died in 2021. He had also organized a scythers' gathering in summer 2019 which I missed, unfortunately. It must have been a great success.

The 'I' in SABI does exist. Chris Hayes, based in Co. Wexford, teaches classes at Seed Savers in Co. Clare, among other locations. Neil Foulkes, based in Co. Leitrim, teaches classes in Belfast and organizes the odd meitheal (= work gathering) in Co. Leitrim and Co. Cavan. John Carey is involved in Corncrake conservation in the West and North of the Republic. Other people are less visible (to me, at least), but mow and promote the scythe all over the country. Chris and Neil as well as a tool supplier in West Cork successfully sell scythe equipment.

My own aim for the past three years has been to meet as many scythe people as possible, both here in Ireland and abroad, and to increasingly incorporate the scythe into my existing garden maintenance business. Covid happened and made meeting people difficult at times. Nevertheless, I did attend quite a few zoom meetings and, once travel was possible again, got to fulfil my wish of meeting many of you. My travels even took me to the Schroeckenfux factory in Rossleithen, Austria in 2021, and to the Green Scythe Fair in Somerset, UK in 2022, both of which were very enjoyable and impressive occasions. I enjoyed a few 'play days' with other scythe enthusiasts and newbies and was delighted to join small scythe gatherings in Co. Leitrim and Co. Cavan. I assume there are numerous small get-togethers happening all over the country that I just don't hear about.

Integrating the scythe into my existing garden

maintenance business is going well. Some strimmer jobs are now done by scythe. Those of my clients who have a wildflower patch let me cut it by scythe. Some clients specifically ask for the scythe to be used and are delighted by its many advantages.

On the downside, a few attempts have been made by myself and others to connect to land conservation / a bird sanctuary / various County Councils, but those endeavours never got very far. Organizations have no funds or are unwilling to pay, volunteering capacities are limited, and expectations are high. The instant, year-round flowering wildflower meadow which requires zero maintenance and attracts only 'cute' wildlife (such as non-stinging bees) simply does not exist. Even a scythe cannot conjure up that kind of miracle.

Various phone calls have been received in which people offer to let us scythe their vast acres of land in exchange for a cup of tea and a scone. Other phone calls voice interest which is then never followed up on once we supply information. All part of the business, I reckon.

As we're spread far and wide over the country, how do we stay in touch? We've had two zoom meetings so far, one in January 2022 and one just now, January 2023. Both pleasant occasions to exchange thoughts, experiences and ideas and to see each other's faces and hear each other's voices. Mary Ellis kindly joined us from the UK both times, to strengthen our link to SABI.

There is an e-mail contact list for any-and everyone interested in scything. Since August 2020, we also have a facebook group, An Faobhar – Scythe Group Ireland. The group has more than 170 members now, in different parts of the world. While there isn't much activity in the group, it's still a place to pass on information, post photos or short videos, ask questions and generally stay connected to other scythers. On top of that, some of us do manage to meet in person every now and then, which is always a joy.

To finish, I would like to voice my thanks to SABI. I know you're quite aware of the 'I' in SABI, and my impression is that you appreciate all our efforts to connect and stay in touch. I perceive SABI as a welcoming, friendly association which offers immense knowledge, support and encouragement. May we see more of each other in future, wherever, whenever. Visitors welcome!



# A Whetstone Fit For a King? (.. and how to assess a whetstone's potential?)

By

*Richard Brown*

Many wonderful Saxon treasures were unearthed from the famous Sutton Hoo Saxon ship burial site in Suffolk. The stand out find for me as a scythesman has to be the magnificent ornate sceptre/whetstone. Since its discovery in 1939 at the Sutton Hoo Royal burial site, the exact significance and purpose of this object has been a matter of much archaeological speculation and debate. Even between my visits to the Sutton Hoo visitor centre its presentation has changed emphasis from being a whetstone to a sceptre. The object strongly suggests elements of both, but as neither sceptre or whetstone completely correspond on their own. One consensus view says that as a ceremonial object in some way it represents both a sceptre (a symbol of power and authority) and a whetstone.

The whetstone attribution comes from the fact that the main structure and feature of the object is carved stone in the shape and form of a large four-sided whetstone, tapering down at top and bottom. If it was purely a ceremonial sceptre the particular choice of stone and form would perhaps seem odd and perhaps unlikely.

On the other hand, the intricate designs and embellishments that ornate this stone clearly elevate the object above that of a purely functional object, even for use in the afterlife. This gives it an additional layer of importance as a symbol of power thus transforming it in to a 'Sceptre'.

A good quality dependable whetstone is, as all scythe owners learn, almost as important as a having a good blade. Even the best scythe falls short if it is not as sharp as it can be,

Experienced scythers each have their favourite whetstone. They also develop their individual preferred system for sharpening. On the scythe competition field this intensifies so that individual peening and honing almost becomes ritualistic. I for one find myself carefully stroking the edge with my finest stone, focusing my mind and attention via the 'magical' stone on to the very edge of my blade; I will the last burrs away hoping to attain ultimate sharpness. This when logically I believe my blade to have been ready to mow before I enter the field. And all this for a tool to cut mundane grass! How much more intense would this all become for an Anglo Saxon. Having the edge on the battlefield could make the difference between death and glory, especially so for a warrior King. It is well known that their swords could acquire mythical status.



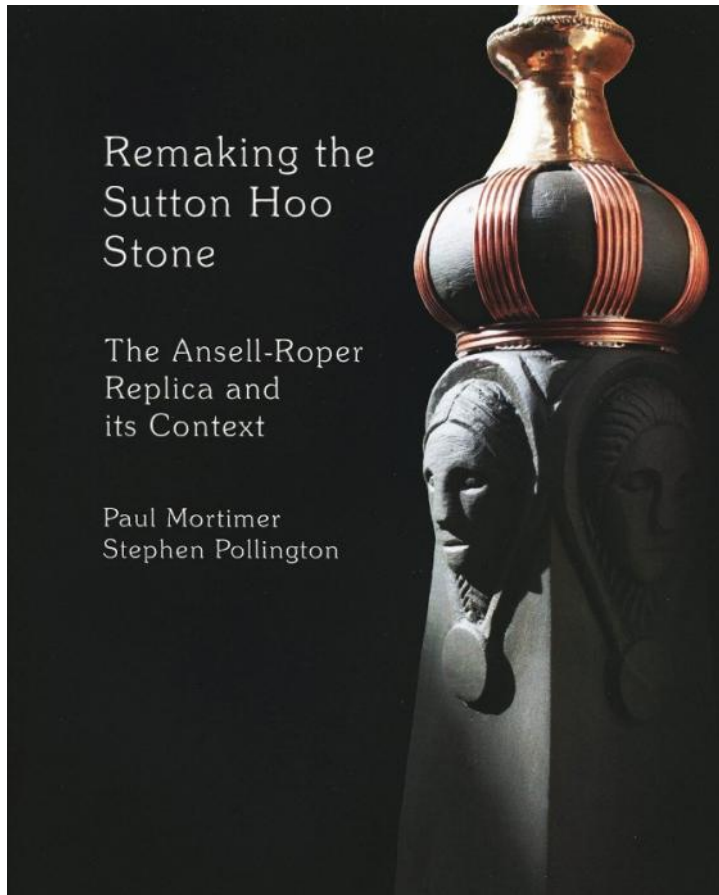
It is not hard to see how important and vital a good companion whetstone would be, and how this might feed into the symbolic narratives of warrior culture. One suggestion I have seen is that this ceremonial whetstone may symbolise the power to be sharp both in sword and in intellect as a leader. "Stay Sharp" as is the moto of our Scythe Association! Anyway, getting back to earth and grass roots. After admiring the form and beauty of this object through



the glass case, my lingering thought was whether this object had potential as a whetstone (as I would prefer) and was this stone capable of putting a good edge on a blade.

My practical approach to such questions is always to look to make something so I can try it out for myself. The first task being to make myself a replica whetstone (a functional not ornate one). Secondly, I needed to devise a system to objectively assess its performance against scythe whetstones that I am familiar with.

### Making a Replica stone



A Sutton Hoo book describes the process taken to reconstruct a close replica of the whetstone for display at the Sutton Hoo visitor centre (the original being held in the British Museum in London). In this book geologists identified the stone as being of Greywacke type, which their stone mason was able to obtain from a quarry in the Yorkshire Dales. There is no mention in this book of experimentally trying to use the replica stone to sharpen an edge.

Whilst visiting the Dales myself last summer I took the opportunity to gather a sample of Greywacke stone from a similar source in Ribblesdale, (this is not far from Tom Lord's farm where we have held Northern Scythe festivals in the past). From this rock sample I fashioned a scythe whetstone of regular canoe scythe whetstone proportions using a diamond disc cutter (water-cooled tile cutter).



Greywacke (German grauwacke, signifying a grey, earthy rock) is a variety of sandstone generally characterized by its hardness, dark colour, and poorly sorted angular grains of hard quartz, feldspar, set in a compact, clay-fine matrix. This rock was first laid down as mixed sediment on the floor of turbulent Ordovician oceans. Later tectonic folding and pressure in the Silurian era partially metamorphosed the sandstone making it harder and smoother. Many of the best natural stone whetstones (e.g. Rozsutec and Mailander) are also types of sandstones.

### Whetstone performance assessment



Technically a whetstone needs to have a balanced a combination of several qualities to perform well. Most essentially, the stone needs to contain sharp angular grains of a sufficiently hard mineral for it to be able to cut steel: in natural stones this is mainly quartz. Like sandpaper these grains need to be of the right grades (from coarse to fine) to achieve the desired outcome and fineness of edge finish. These cutting grains then need to be held in place securely by a matrix 'glue' of just the right strength. If this bond is too weak the stone will just crumble. If the bond is too strong (as in granite or millstone grit) the quartz grains at the surface will become blunt and rounded and will cease to function unless the surface is dressed like a grindstone to expose fresh angular grains.

The ideal matrix for a whetstone is strong enough to hold the quartz grains in position so they cut efficiently, but soft enough that surface progressively erodes shedding dulled grains as they wear to expose fresh ones beneath. A bit like how shark's teeth renew their bite.

A quick try out of my new greywacke whetstone on a scythe blade showed that it could indeed sharpen a blade. I however felt that I needed to explore the qualities of this stone more objectively and to be able to make a comparison with other well established natural stone whetstones like the Rozsutec and Mailander?

As it happens, I also have a more practical need to be able to assess a range of other whetstones to compare familiar stones (some now going out of production) with alternative new stones.

Before devising an assessment method, I first asked other scythe instructors what they looked for when assessing whetstones. The consensus seemed to focus on three main criteria:

1. What effective grade is the grit: fine/ medium/ coarse: what sort of edge does it deliver
2. How quickly does it remove metal: fast or slow?
3. How hard/soft/durable is the stone (the body or matrix)

From these I devised as series of three bench tests to assess each in turn.

**1: Grit size.** With natural stone direct examination of the look and feel of the rock composition and grit characteristics is not particularly informative. A better test is an indirect approach of looking at the scratch pattern created on a plain polished metal surface under a microscope, and grading this as coarse to fine. Examination of the scratch pattern produced by the greywacke stone in my bench scratch test showed that it produces an extra-fine scratch pattern of similar quality to the extra-fine Rozsutec whetstone.

**2: Cutting speed.** In my next bench test, I assessed how much steel it could remove in two minutes of honing (from a 2-inch nail - in milligrams). As one would predict, speed of removal is generally proportional to grit size; with coarse stones removing metal faster than fine stones. My tests suggested that greywacke could remove metal faster than a Rozsutec, a stone of equivalent grade. All positive so far.

**3: Softness.** My final bench test was to assess the softness of each stone. For this I subjected each stone to ten second burst with a tungsten tipped masonry bit and measured the size of the impression created in this time. Greywacke was the most wear resistant rock in my drill tests. This resilience to wear was not a great surprise as I had read that this is what makes it one of the best stones for surfacing roads. Most of the stone quarried in Ribblesdale is crushed to provide the aggregate component of tarmac.

As a whetstone however this quality might prove a limitation if the stone dulls in use and does not wear back to expose fresh sharp-edged grit. I have not used the greywacke stone for long enough to find out to what extent this happens. Perhaps though, a warrior does not need to sharpen their sword quite as often as a scyther needs to whet their blade? - unless times are particularly turbulent!

I cannot know whether Saxons actually selected and used Greywacke to hone their swords. As the fresh greywacke worked well as a whetstone in my tests, I believe it helps keeps the possibility alive. My next test will have to be to take my 'Saxon' whetstone to the next scythe competition to see if its magical properties can give me the edge in battle! A more detailed description of my bench tests and how regular stones compare can be found on the website.





# Whetstone Rejuvenation

By

*Adrian Thomas*

Are your whetstones not performing quite as well as when you first got them? A wash and scrub up with some detergent of your whetstone (and don't forget to washout your holder) straight after use stops grass juices and dirt clogging the stone.

Sometimes though this is not enough and the stone becomes clogged with microscopic fragments of metal, eventually rust, from regular honing. You often see this as "glazing" on electric grindstones. The whetstone is no longer able to shed the worn, rounded grinding particles which would allow fresh, sharp grit particles to do the grinding. The "glazing" appears as smooth shiny areas and are clogging the stone.

Staining of the whetstone is not an issue and should not impact the efficiency of honing.

When your whetstone becomes "glazed" or the dirt stubbornly refuses to come off with scrubbing try using one of these, a **WHEEL DRESSING STICK**. You can use coarse wet and dry papers or an old very coarse carborundum stone as an alternative. The wheel dressing stone is just a square side piece of coarse carborundum which "opens up" the surface of your whetstone leading to more effective honing. Cost about £6 from the likes of Axminster tools.

After scrubbing whetstone  
still clogged with dirt

First photo shows an Artic Fox and a Bull Thistle whetstones after a good soak and scrub, but still shows signs of clogging - see the right hand end

The second photo shows the same whetstones after a rub with the wheel dressing stone. I have been using these stones exclusively for the last six months to see how they perform. Therefore I only use one end of the stones. The unused end is grubby from handling and not from honing.

Whetstones cleared  
of glazing



## *Another Scything Year – three years in one?*

I have had an amazing 3 years since I last wrote in 2019, Vincent Van Gogh and his approach to painting sums it up too. Van Gogh rarely painted something once, there are many 'copies' of the same object or project, he was trying to understand and appreciate many aspects of his craft, as we do learning to scythe. Everything is up for grabs. We are all so different and it takes a wise teacher to spot the subtleties of a good scyther and help them go that bit further with their technique. The funny part is change can be immediate or can take weeks or months or more to happen. We never stop learning.

As we get older we carry a few physical difficulties: a 70+ year old could not sit at a peening pony, he was so beaten up from 50yrs of working on building sites. He and his wife were very keen, his wife got the hang of scything very quickly but how would they peen the blades? The solution I suggested was to put posts in the ground in the garden, at a height that he was happy with, and peen in the standing position. They seem to be getting on ok..... apart from losing their nuts.

Back in March 2022 Ruth Pullan and I ran a course for 13 in the Black Mountains, on a site where a group of us had planted several thousand trees, mainly big thick hedges. It rained all day,

The great thing about having a large group is everything gets multiplied, the bad habits, you name it but if the teaching works everyone comes away having had a lot of joy not to mention able to swoooooosh too!

June is always highlighted by the Scythe Fair at Langport. It was our first for three years and everyone was keen to make up for lost time. Yes the grass was easy to cut but way too easy to cock-up too. What was so wonderful was all the young 20/30+ year olds getting involved and making their mark. It does take a lot of volunteers to help make it run smoothly.



This contrasts with Parrysfield (on the right), no smiling volunteers or young enthusiasts here, just a crusty old scyther but while we scythed in Dorset the meadow looked after itself. Yes Parrysfield meadow, 10 years in the making, now has over 100 orchids in an ever changing meadow and, of course, it is smells beautiful too, before cutting, during cutting and while we're making hay.

My wish is for a better understanding of scything and everything that goes into it, from the scythe, blades, honing, peening, managing the meadow and timing haymaking. Three years ago we scythed in August, last year the end of July, the contrast was amazing. This year we are scything at the end of July!

I started with beautiful grass blades 10 years ago (after learning with Phil and Michelle in Wales), but when I introduced those blades at Parrysfield they didn't work for me and it has taken me a long time to get back to bigger blades. Until three years ago I was still using a 65cm ditch blade for everything: Grass, Brambles, Docks, you name it, I'm very happy scything with this blade but I needed to train myself to use the bigger blades to scythe successfully at Parrys! My technique to get to use the bigger blades was to regularly change blades 40-65-75, they all helped me to understand and create muscle memory; when it came to the 95 I was hit and miss. One minute I could use it well the next I could not, embarrassing!! So I did not use my 95 at Langport too risky. I also play with wedges, hafting angles and moving the handles up and down. At the end of July we had a small Scythe Festival at Parrysfield in Orcop Hill. Everyone who came added to the dynamic, even if they only came for a short while. They started dribbling in on Wednesday, Colin first, helping to set up the awning, so if it rained we could still eat outside. Nicole arrived Thursday, too late for dinner, but we cobbled something together, barbecue corn on the cob and other delights. By the





early morning we were scything together, finishing off the patch that Colin and I started the previous day. With six of us scything we swathed through the entire meadow in no time at all and it was such pleasurable labour.

August was a train journey to Sweden, a greenwood working course at Saterglantan followed by 4 days scythe related activities with Jenny Nilsson, near



Gothenburg. We spent a lot of time talking scything, especially peening, and the many styles of scythes that Jenny sells/collects. Two days at Gunnebo Slott, selling, marketing and teaching people to scythe. It was pure joy to see how much scything was going on at Gunnebo, Jenny has done well to teach Scything & related Land Management Courses. Jenny is planning to come to '23 Scythe Festival and people will get to enjoy her enthusiasm as I did in Sweden.

Meanwhile I have started making scythes again and the challenge now has been to make the bottom handle from branches/trunks to suit the individual. This is a huge amount of work to whittle a branch into the right shape: angles/height/diameter. I got so envious of others getting their own 'special' handle that I went looking for my own. There should be at least a couple at the Scythe fair '23. As us oldies get more infirm we need all the help we can get. What is so important in this design is to have an expert eye, someone like Kevin

Austin casting his eye over the 'student' can see what would help with the clever design of the bottom handle. These handles are longer than the standard so that ones right-hand can be in many different positions to ergonomically scythe in different 'grass' conditions. Yes sometimes your hand needs to be in front of the snath, or at least over the top, and this is uncomfortable in the present set-up, and certainly why the Danish snath is favoured at times.

The most crazy thing about my scything year was the huge energy for scything that seemed to be coming from all directions, for instance, when I joined forces with Andrea Gilpin and drove to Simon Fairlie's to pick up what I thought would be two years' supply of scythes I found that I was reordering within a few months!

In summary '22 has been about trying to help people scythe in a much more 'ergonomic style', with grace rather than aggression, using as much of the whole body as possible and not just the arms. Everyone is different and has to find their own style. I'm still learning the art of scything and I've a lot to learn about the craft of teaching too.

David Kuegler - a 69year old scyther (never too old to learn or get better)



# Backbreaker Meadow

By

*Susanne Raven*

The blade of steel slices through blades of grass. Blade of steel, forged from scratch, hardened by fire, oil and water, by thousands of hammer blows. Steel from the earth. Blades of grass, grown from seed, soft and sweet in spring, now toughened by a long, dry summer, flattened by heavy rain and tangled to a thick thatch by the first autumn storms. Grass from the earth.

The gardener has mown this meadow before. She knows it's a tough job, one of the toughest of the year. She has left it too late. Life and death had gotten in the way of a spring cut and then the months had flown past. Yet, this year the job is a bit easier than last year. She now knows how to tackle it and she knows she can do it.

She chooses the short blade first, to get in close to the trees, freeing them from tall vegetation and root suckers. This bit takes forever. Tree branches are getting in her way.

Then the blade hits a bundle of sticks overgrown by long grass. She remembers. Early in the year, the client thought it a good idea to collect sticks for kindling. The gardener had suggested taking the sticks to the shed for drying. It would have been easy. The wheelbarrow was right there, the shed not far. Instead, the sticks had been placed under a tree – 'for later'. The gardener had foreseen: sticks being forgotten, never collected, overgrown. And so it had happened. She bends to pick up the sticks, now half-rotten, no longer of use. The potential beginnings of a warming fire in the stove, turned into an obstacle. She continues with her task, now attaching a slightly longer blade for severing a nasty type of fine grass that will not be cut, constantly folding underneath the blade, hanging on like there was an escape. There isn't.

A friend is driving past. The gardener knows that the friend has seen her car in the driveway, knows she's there. Why doesn't the friend stop for a brief chat? A hundred possible reasons.

The friendship is fairly new, not established yet. Both parties have yet to explore mutually suitable ways of communication. The gardener is desperate for a chat. She wants to see, ask, listen, to touch base. The friend drives past without stopping. Maybe in a hurry. Probably not. Maybe not in a chatty mood this early in the morning.

Maybe he doesn't want people to see him talking to the gardener. The friend has a past. People know or think they know. People talk. Maybe the friend wants to protect the gardener.

Maybe the friend wants to protect himself and is ashamed of being associated with the gardener. He wouldn't be the first.

Maybe the friend doesn't stop because he doesn't want to disturb the gardener's work. Maybe he doesn't stop because he doesn't want his own routine disturbed. The gardener has a fair understanding of the need for routine. She, like the friend, lives a solitary life. Routine helps her deal with solitude, keeps her sane, makes the endless passing of time bearable. Routine can be a source of joy. It can supply some sense of meaning. The gardener knows all this, and yet her heart aches at the thought that the need for routine might rank higher in the friend's perception than the need for nurturing their newly discovered connection.

The gardener cuts through grass, anthills, tussocks, briars. It's a choppy ride. Tough, heavy work. The scythe creaks. The blade has to be sharpened every few minutes. The gardener's back aches. Her joints ache. She is not a young woman. Her heart aches. So many lost friendships. A lifetime of lost friendships. Heartbreak. Loneliness. Solitude. The miracle of meeting a friend who, too, lives a solitary life. The immense joy of connecting, of being same, of being different, of deep talk, questions, answers, laughter, of sharing. But how is this going to work? Throw two solitary creatures together who aren't all that keen on humankind, and then what?

The gardener is scared of hurting her friend and of losing him.

The friend drives past again, without stopping. He's honking the car horn briefly. What's that supposed to mean?

The gardener is sad and tired. She feels defeated, unwanted. She keeps working, cutting, slicing. The vegetation changes again, from fine grass to long lofty vetch and twisted Yorkshire Fog. The gardener changes to yet another, longer blade. The scythe is eating through the meadow, bit by bit by bit. The job has to be done. Today. Giving up is not an option. The gardener's arms grow heavier and heavier. Thinking about her friend, her heart grows heavier and heavier.

The gardener knows that she's good at what she's doing. In the three years since she first held a scythe in her hands, she has learned how to connect with the tool, how to keep the blade razor-sharp, how to approach the task of mowing a meadow, be it a well-kept field for hay-making, a light newly-sown wildflower area or a tough-as-nails patch like this one. She has fallen in love with scythe work.

In the many years of living a solitary life, she has learned how to be good at that, too. She has come to see loneliness and solitude as sources of great strength and courage. She has learned that for her, like for many people, it is necessary to get her heart broken. This is how the heart opens. This is how the light gets in.



The job is finished. The now tame-looking meadow is mown and raked, the heavy arisings are forked away into the ditch. Rain is falling now, mixing with the tears streaming down the gardener's face. She is

exhausted to the bone.

Another job done.

If only keeping and growing a friendship were as easy as mowing the Backbreaker Meadow.

## Green Fayre: Scything course, Muchelney, June 2022

### A personal account.

by

*Jenny Hoare*

I bought a scythe and attended a course with Nicole Clough in July 2019, which got me started. All through 'lockdown' I mowed my garden lawn obsessively while my husband and I planned and executed our retirement move to Shropshire.

By June 2022, we had been in our 4.5 acre (very) small-holding for just over a year. I'd discovered SABI and 'Andi', 'Adrian' and 'Suzanne' my new on-line gurus, as I peened, mowed, made hay and grew calluses. Then I heard about the Green Fayre. It's a long way from North Shropshire to Somerset but Suzanne was coming further. I was determined to put faces to names and really join the scything community.

I planned a journey stopping off to visit family and friends to justify all that petrol use and I borrowed my daughter's tent, picking it up in Hertfordshire en route. The youngsters laughed at my Razierschnitt (65cm) and Ditch blade (60cm) nestling in my boot and decided I ought to take their foot pump and lilo to beef up my 1/4inch yoga mat. Did I not know how cold and hard it is sleeping on the round?

The Facebook community promised to help me put up my tent but it was a lot easier than the bell tents I remember from Guide camps 50+ years ago. Soon I was surrounded by assorted tents and camper vans and smiling faces.

The camp site was vast. The shower blocks and toilets were a bit of a trek from the scythers' campsite but I was pretty sure I'd give the composting version a miss unless really desperate.

Suzanne and Adrian were as helpful in person as 'on-line'. Andi would be one of the tutors along with Phil and Kevin. A perfect triumvirate of tutors. All experts but each with their own style of mowing and teaching. 14 'improvers' gathered for our first session – some were already pretty good, but everyone had things to learn.

With Andi, I improved my blade set-up and the 'wedge' really made a difference (thank you Adrian). I was so impressed with Andi's easy style, speed, and power through the entire cutting arc. She found some pretty challenging 'lodged' grass, just like we all had

at home, marching us across the entire campsite! It was a great place to practise making paths!

Phil's peening session was the least sociable event, with almost incessant hammering, most people absorbed in the task, ear protectors in place. The session went on well into the late afternoon. I borrowed a garria block to remove rust from my neglected blade before starting the peening. Some of us were a bit ahead of ourselves and keen to try our newly peened blades were shocked to find them completely blunt! Phil guided us in the use of coarse stones and then a final honing with a smooth stone and the blades were transformed.

Phil also introduced us to a whole variety of blades. The different lengths were obvious but Phil pointed out their natural curvature and 'lay' and how these characteristics might affect the cutting stroke. Really interesting.

Kevin was 'in to' ergonomic mowing and we had fun mirroring his movements transferring weight from right to left, relaxing and breathing. My mowing stroke was widening and becoming more consistent, I was less breathless and more confident.

The refreshment tent and a team of 'helpers' were terrific, working all day to look after us. Drinks were essential. The sun was scorching and I was getting sunburnt even through my clothes. The food provided was excellent and there was plenty of social time to hear other people's stories and to share experiences.

The one day 'Fayre' was being assembled around us on the Friday and Saturday. Improvers had two days of instruction, the beginners just one day and on the Sunday, the public arrived to sample foods, drinks, crafts, but especially, to watch the scything competitions, a crazy hay race and generally bask in the sunshine.

The mowing competitions and team demonstrations were enthralling. I volunteered to do a stint in the 'tea-tent' and managed to miss the mowing finals but was delighted to meet Nicole again and say a big thank you for starting me on my scything journey. This was an overwhelmingly friendly and supportive weekend. I learned so much, not least, there is more than one way to mow a meadow.



## Dream of Eglan Fawr - the "hospital field"

By  
*Jane Jarvis*

I sometimes dream of a farm I seek - a place called Eglan Fawr  
where livestock choose the herbs they need, from a field that's full of flowers.

Untouched, undrained, enriched or drenched by herbicidal sprays  
the scent of meadowsweet fills the air on balmy summer days.  
Devil's bit scabious nod pretty heads, beside the yarrow, creamy white  
and before yellow vetch and harebells blue, marsh orchids are in sight.  
Early summer brings the sound of buzzing insects in the air,  
and butterflies are dancing. There's abundance here to share.

The sheep come here to convalesce, chewing herbs to cure  
their lameness, diarrhoea or worms - they know what each plant's for:  
For worms they might choose chicory; for bones, the comfrey's good;  
Wild garlic, thyme and marjoram can aid in cleansing blood.  
Welsh poppies help to ease their ills and the willow bends for pain  
and every year the land is left alone, to yield the same plants once again.

I heard someone tried to buy the land, to drain and spray, improve the soil  
but "No!" the owner cried, "Leave well alone! These plants, they ease your toil.  
Your sheep, they come here, tired and sick. This meadow makes them well  
Eglan Fawr is a healing field and not something I'd sell.  
Long ago our people grew, these flowers as stock feed  
They didn't have to buy them in. They knew the useful seeds.

Thistles can be cut for cows. Sheep like bracken fronds and gorse  
Even nettles are important, being a vital mineral source.  
Woundwort, clover, dandelions - these all have a place  
if we'd learn to leave the soil alone and ignore the chemical race."

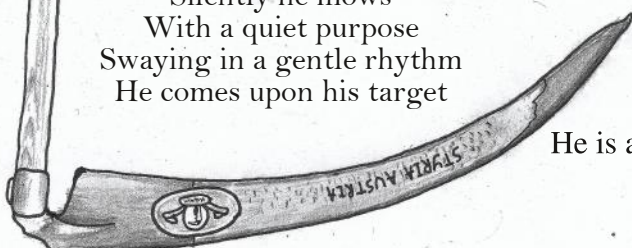
One day I'll find that field I seek, in mid Montgomeryshire  
The field that heals the animals, a field that's full of flowers.

### "Ode to Ade"

Silently he mows  
With a quiet purpose  
Swaying in a gentle rhythm  
He comes upon his target

With a decisive sweep  
He is neither Planetman, nor Bionicman  
Neither Superman, nor Spiderman  
Nor even Cyberman

He is a Scytheman





## Faux Meadows

### *Worries about the repercussions of a fashionable misnomer.*

by

*Simon Fairlie*

Few factoids have had such a resounding success as that which claims that “the UK has lost 97 percent of its wildflower meadows since the 1930s”. The figure is suspect, not least because the term wildflower meadow wasn’t in use in the 1930s. The 1971 Oxford English Dictionary doesn’t give any listing for “wildflower” between “wildire” and “wildfowl”.

Yet it is almost obligatory nowadays for any person or organisation who speaks or writes about meadows to cite this statistic, without giving any clue to its provenance. A full list would fill columns and include the National Trust, Kew Gardens, Natural England, Plantlife, the Ecologist, the Guardian, The Independent, The Times, The Daily Mail, the

the “Nibblers” email list provided me with the answer (I later found a New Scientist article that did cite the reference). The source is a paper written in 1984 by R M Fuller, entitled “The Changing Extent and Conservation Interest of Lowland Grasslands in England and Wales: A Review of Grassland Surveys 1930-84”.<sup>1</sup>

### Chinese Whispers

As is so often the case with factoids, a certain amount of “Chinese Whispering” has taken place between the initial source and its articulation on the internet, and in this case the following adjustments have been made to Fuller’s original conclusion.



*Is this 100 acre plot in Devon, sown with poppies, ox-eye daisies and cornflowers, Britain’s largest flower bed? Or will there be a resurgence of grasses and a late hay crop when the flowers die back?*

Morning Star, the Parliamentary Environmental Audit Committee, and three Secretaries of State for the Environment: Caroline Spelman, Michael Gove and Liz Truss.

The alleged 97 percent loss of meadows has become the dominant statistical justification for the fashion for establishing wildflower meadows that has swept the country in the last few years. Local conservation groups try to revive them; councils sow them along verges; millionaires fold them into their plans for luxury rural retreats; retired baby boomers buy a field and reseed it with a wildflower mix; householders convert their lawns to a “no-mow May” regime, which they allow to run through to “no-mow September” before facing the fact that their lawnmower can’t cope with the vegetation.

Since none of the authorities listed above give any reference for the figure, I spent a good forty minutes trying to find it on the internet, until a colleague on

(i) Fuller’s study covers England and Wales, not the whole of the UK.

(ii) His figures only relate to lowland grassland, and so would not cover, for example, much of the Yorkshire Dales, which is, or at least was, renowned for “internationally important hay meadows”.<sup>2</sup>

(iii) He is not just comparing the state of meadows, but of all lowland grassland, ie both meadows (which are mown for hay) and pasture (which is grazed but not mown) — but excluding rough grazing, by which he means unenclosed land such as commons. I haven’t located figures for England and Wales, but in 1934 in Great Britain as a whole, only 28.7 percent of permanent grassland was hay meadow.<sup>3</sup> The proportion of the unimproved lowland hay meadows of the 1930s which remained intact in 1984 would therefore be closer to ten percent than to three percent.

(iv) The comparison is between 1934 and 1984. Thirty-nine years have passed since then, during which land management practices have changed, though not necessarily for the better.

(v) Fuller doesn’t mention wildflowers. In fact the word flower doesn’t feature once in the entire 20 page paper, though there are mentions of “broadleaved weeds”.

What Fuller does say is that “unimproved pastures (excluding rough grazings), which once made up the bulk of Britain’s lowland grasslands, now only cover 0.2 million hectares, four percent of present day lowland grasslands, three percent of the pre-war total.” That is where the 97 percent loss is derived from. The pre-war total of lowland grassland was 7.8 million hectares, of which, Fuller estimates, 5.2 million hectares were unimproved, so with only 0.2 million hectares remaining, 96.15 percent were lost.



*Hay-making in the lowlands in the 1940s*

Finally, how does Fuller define “improved and unimproved”? In the 1930s, all permanent grassland is taken to be unimproved, except that which had recently been converted from arable. His primary indicator of improved grassland in subsequent years is a ryegrass content in the sward of over 20 percent, which might have been caused by reseeding, drainage and/or fertiliser application. He states that “we cannot directly estimate the proportions of different grasslands which are “species-rich” or of “conservation value” but provides evidence that there is a strong association between improvement and loss of biodiversity.

In other words, instead of “the UK has lost 97 percent of its wildflower meadows since the 1930s”, a more correct summary of Fuller’s paper might read “between 1934 and 1984 in England and Wales, 96 percent of all unimproved lowland grassland was ‘improved’ through practices such as drainage, reseeding and fertiliser application, resulting in a loss of biodiversity, including lowering broadleaved plants.

### ”Wildflowers or Weeds?

Does this sloppy reporting matter? It is undeniable that there has been a massive loss of biodiversity. Is it not permissible and indeed sensible for campaigners, newspapers and politicians to condense and dumb down scientific conclusions into a simple memorable statistic, even at the expense of accuracy? Is it not sometimes necessary, in order to engage the public in a worthy project, to conjure up an evocative new concept, such as “wildflower meadow” and suggest that it has a long pedigree? Or does it lead to a skewed analysis of the problem and off-target solutions?

To understand the reasons for the sudden decline in grassland biodiversity, consider the historic context. In 1934 Britain was at the lowest point of an agricultural recession that had lasted 60 years. The country imported more than 60 percent of its food. Arable land in England and Wales, as Fuller points out, had declined from around 6 million hectares in 1870 to less than 4.5 million, while the area of permanent pasture increased correspondingly. In effect land was being abandoned because the country couldn’t be bothered to feed itself. Fuller cites several observations from the

influential (though not necessarily accurate) agricultural author R G Stapledon:<sup>4</sup> that in the 1930s permanent grass farms “showed some of the worst examples of slovenly, negligent and deplorable husbandry”; that “thousands of acres should be labelled ‘weedland’ rather than grassland”; and that he “would not be surprised if the total area of such grasslands . . . exceeded 2.5 million acres”.

One man’s weed is another man’s wildflower. Was Stapledon describing the freckled cowslip, burnet and similar wild flowers that

Shakespeare tells us are “brought sweetly forth from an even mead.”<sup>5</sup> Not necessarily: in the very same passage that speaks of 2.5 million acres of weedland, Stapledon makes this statement, not reproduced in Fuller’s paper:

“I wish I could catalogue for the country as a whole the acreage (and I am at present concerned with farm lands and not with the rough and hill grazings) under bracken, under rushes, in *Nardus* (matgrass) and *Molinia* (purple moor grass), and that really very large area that is excessively weedy”.<sup>6</sup>

What a shame that Stapledon couldn’t catalogue it because then we would have a better idea how much of the lowland grass that has been improved since the 1930s could reasonably have answered to the description “wildflower meadow”. He doesn’t explain what he means by “excessively weedy” other than that it frequently includes “buttercups in truly harmful amounts”. But it would appear that a substantial proportion of the 97 percent of “lost wildflower meadow” was in fact overtaken by bracken, rushes, buttercups, poor quality grasses and other plants often associated with rank, sour or waterlogged soils. here is currently no shortage in the British Isles of this kind of vegetation.

On the other hand Stapledon praises those meadows whose hay “is held in high esteem by farmers” and whose value “undoubtedly turns upon its complexity”.<sup>7</sup>

The evidence is overwhelming that a large number of species-rich grasslands either disappeared completely or deteriorated in respect of biodiversity as the UK strove to become more self-sufficient in food after the privations of the Second World War. As grass was ploughed up to grow arable crops, the area of permanent grassland in the UK shrunk from seven million hectares in the early 1930s back to 4.8 million hectares in 1975, the same as it had been in 1870. Most of this remaining grass was subject during the second half of the century to measures designed to improve productivity, notably ploughing up to reseed; drainage, fertiliser and herbicide application; and silage production instead of hay.



## “Beauty and Utility”

The main problem with the wildflower meadow factoid is not that it overstates the harm caused to the biodiversity of meadows (though it may do). The problem is that it sows in the public imagination a picture of a golden age of floral abundance and confers a bogus historical pedigree upon a novel form of land use. The meaning of the word meadow has been usurped, the role that meadows play in an agricultural ecology is obscured, and the crucial



*Hay making in the fells of Northern England*

question of how to achieve a symbiosis between food production and ecological welfare is sidelined. The role of meadows in an organic pre-industrial economy was not to produce biodiversity, or a display of flowers. The immediate purpose was to feed livestock over winter so that more could be kept to take advantage of summer growth. It was a bit like receiving matching funding: every kilo of hay meant another two kilos of surplus summer vegetation could be harvested as feed. The ulterior purpose, in lowland arable areas, was to supply manure to staple arable crops such as wheat, oats and barley. Because of the matching funding effect it would be worth putting some manure back on the meadows. But since the farmer needed to extract fertility from the meadows, they were unlikely to be manured heavily, if at all. If, after successive hay crops, the yields dropped too low, an alternative to manuring would be to allow the yield to recover by converting it to pasture for a few years.

The Park Grass experiments at Rothamsted experimental station includes Plot three, where two hay cuts have been taken continuously every year since 1856. Yields have stabilised at a low level that ranges from 600 to 1000 kilos per acre (the equivalent of 30 to 50 small bales).<sup>8</sup>

Other plots at Rothamsted, which have received various doses of manure or fertilisers every year, unsurprisingly have considerably higher yields — but also host fewer species. Over a period of 46 years, Plot Eleven, where high amounts of nitrogen, superphosphate, and potash were added, had yields which were about four times as high as in Plot Three — but Plot Three hosted four times as many species as Plot Eleven.<sup>9</sup>

That species-rich meadows require low levels of fertility is fully recognised by advocates of wildflower meadows — though not always by those who establish them. Desperate measures to reduce fertility are sometimes taken, notably scraping off all the top soil with a bulldozer and trucking it somewhere else. Eco-minded land managers who opt to sow a wildflower meadow on rich soil are given conflicting advice: that they should take as many hay cuts as possible off the land to remove fertility; yet not to take any hay cut until the flowers have gone to seed in late July or August — by which time the grass has often shed many of the nutrients that are supposed to be removed, and is starting to look like straw. Another device for increasing biodiversity is to sow yellow rattle, a parasitic plant that weakens grasses by drawing nutrients from their roots. At one conference centre in mid-summer I came across a “wildflower meadow” that consisted almost entirely of knapweed, lesser plantain and yellow rattle — oh, and a sort of stone circle in the middle with a sculpture. It wasn’t a meadow at all, nor were the flowers wild: it was a two-acre flowerbed. All of this is perverse, since the obvious way to reduce fertility is to remove the grass and feed it to animals. That is what meadows were invented for.

From an environmental and a food production point of view this a win/win strategy, serving, in Shakespeare’s words, “both beauty and utility”. Sowing a parasitic weed that stifles the growth of the very grasses and clovers which ruminants eat from a farming point of view is unproductive and ecologically short-sighted.<sup>10</sup> So is leaving the grass standing so long that it becomes unpalatable and less nutritious. It is not uncommon, in my line of work, to meet enthusiasts who have gone to all the trouble of establishing an acre or two of wildflower meadow without apparently realising that, in the absence of livestock, they will not only have to mow the grass every year, but also remove several tons of vegetation from their field with no end in view, and find somewhere to put it.

## Back to the Future

There is, let us be clear, nothing wrong with sowing wildflower beds (or wild flowerbeds) in private gardens, municipal parks, or along roadside verges. Indeed, this should be encouraged for the pleasure it gives to humans and insects alike. These flowerbeds just shouldn’t be called meadows.

On a larger scale, mixing wild flower or herbal seed in with a grass seed mix, or transplanting plugs of wild flowers into a sward, or using “green hay” from a species-rich meadow to reseed a less well-endowed one, are all commendable practices. But if we want to improve the biodiversity of our grassland, we should safeguard the term “meadow”, backstage “wildflower”, and stick to the scientifically approved “species-rich”. And if we want meadows that are as species-rich as those of days gone by, then we need to farm as they

did in days gone by, that is to say organically, without using artificial fertilisers and herbicides. Once we have rid ourselves of the surplus of fossil fuel fertility that has made industrial agriculture so dysfunctional, our meadows will again be harvested for their fertility, and hopefully regain their integrity and their former glory. It will take time, and some species and ecosystems may be irretrievable. But when Fuller was writing, 85 percent of lowland swards were subject to applications of artificial fertiliser. In 2015, just 50 percent of hay meadows received a dressing of nitrogen fertiliser.<sup>11</sup>

With the rocketing price of gas and fertiliser, we can reasonably hope that we are heading in the right direction.

1. Published in *Biological Conservation*, 40, pp281-300, 1987
2. Fuller takes lowland to mean areas where at least 70 percent of the land is below 198 metres (650 feet). According to the ecologist Philip Wilson, many of the Yorkshire Dale meadows have become sheep pasture since the 1980s. Pers com.

3. B R Mitchell, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, Cambridge, 1971.
4. Philip Wilson considers Stapledon unreliable. Pers com op cit 2.
5. W Shakespeare, *Henry V*, Act V, Scene 2
6. RG Stapledon, *The Land Now and Tomorrow*, 1935, p 77 of third edition 1944.
7. RG Stapledon, *The Way of the Land*, 1943, p 141.
8. Dataset: Park Grass Hay Yields, Fertilizer and Lime Treatments 1965-2018, Rothamsted [www.era.rothamsted.ac.uk](http://www.era.rothamsted.ac.uk)
9. C. Lane, *The Development of Pastures and Meadows during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* [www.bahs.org.uk/](http://www.bahs.org.uk/)
10. For a different perspective on Yellow Rattle, see R Brown, "Grass Roots Redistribution", *The Land* 27, p 57.
11. British Survey of Fertiliser Practice 2015, p 48, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk>

Thanks to Philip Wilson and Richard Brown for their critical comments. All views expressed here are mine. SF

This article and it's response were first published in "The Land"

## Conservation Meadows

### *Richard Brown responds to "Faux Meadows".*

Overall I would that 96 percent of all to unimproved significantly damaged in some way from a biodiversity point of view, even if some from a very low baseline, like rush pastures involving a smaller numbers of species. While traditionally managed lowland meadows would have varied in the range and diversity of plants within them, they were generally known to be quite diverse with herbs and Stapledon's weeds as documented in agricultural textbooks of the period and descriptions by botanists and ecologists like Tansley. Given the potency of just adding fertiliser I think it also reasonable that of the grassland that was once flower rich, at least 96 percent of this subset will have also been damaged, so the general statement that 96 percent of flower rich meadows is not unreasonable.

### Meadow Terminology

I agree, the term meadow is frequently usurped. My personal particular bugbear is the so called "pictorial meadows" of annuals like cosmos and Californian poppies etc., which are clearly neither native wild flowers, meadow plants or even meadow-like communities (don't even qualify as faux meadows). Meadows were not devised to create diversity or a pleasing floral display. Meadows were created specifically to provide essential fodder for livestock through winter — a revolution in husbandry that was only possible after the invention of the scythe. The fact that this system also created some of the most botanically rich habitat in Europe was a happy historical accident. From this it follows that if you manage your grassland in this way, you will get a

meadow. The evidence suggests that the closer you get to traditional management cycles of cutting and grazing the better the results for structure and diversity. But the absence of direct association between a meadow and livestock does not disqualify it from being a meadow and make it a "faux meadow". If it contains a similar perennial grass and plant community as a meadow, is managed as a meadow with "hay removal," and it looks like a meadow — then it is a meadow. The original aim (c.1980) of the current wild flower trend was simply to create new floristically diverse grassland in amenity settings to mitigate at least some of the historic losses elsewhere (regardless of what actual percentage). It was recognised that farmland was needed for farming, but there was potential away from farms to repurpose grassland in amenity settings (ie grassland on land with no agricultural or horticultural (sports turf) function. We did call them species-early rich or days, species but diverse as we explicitly grasslands referenced avoiding traditional "meadows" meadow in the grassland as the blueprint, both for the species composition and their management, it quickly made more sense to refer to them as meadows or meadow grassland (particularly once the technique was shown to work). Using long winded "scientific" jargon terms like species rich biodiverse grassland is too much. Having no associated livestock does free up the occupier of amenity meadows from some of the constraints a farmer has in trying to secure the best quality and yield of nutritious fodder as hay or silage. There is more flexibility in cutting dates to suit the context and site objectives, but this sometimes leads to



poor short-term management choices which then act against the long-term welfare of the grassland habitat as a whole. The success of amenity meadows in creating flower-rich grassland and in delivering tangible benefits to wildlife paved the way for the wider adoption of the meadow grassland concept in agri-environment schemes, and within wildlife conservation. Here the potential to buffer, link and extend vulnerable fragments of original habitat was seen as being as important as creating habitat itself. These conservation meadows are managed with livestock where this is practical, but more often by machinery.

### What About the Future?

Is there really any prospect of returning to something like the pre-industrial mixed farm idyll where freckled cowslips flourished? What future role have livestock in our diets and farmed landscape? Perhaps instead of fodder for livestock, meadows can provide feed for electricity generation?

Then there is rewilding. Is this the final solution for grassland where livestock is unsustainable: to pay already rich landowners to abandon the pretence of farming and put up big fences "to protect their wildlife." A planned abandonment scenario might have results not dissimilar to previous agricultural recessions such as that of the 1930's. We may bear in mind

Shakespeare's warning about neglecting meadows:

The even mead that erst brought sweetly forth  
The freckled cowslip, burnet and green clover  
Wanting the scythe, all uncorrected, rank  
Conceives by idleness, and nothing teems  
But hateful docks, rough thistles, keksies, burs,  
Losing both beauty and utility.

For many years Richard Brown worked for Emorsgate Seeds which pioneered the wild flower seeding of meadows.



## FROM THE EDITOR

### OUR FRIENDS IN IRELAND

In this issue of The Windrow I was delighted to feature two articles from Susanne Raven a member of the SABI Irish contingent. Her efforts made the Irish scything scene much more visible to us. There is now an Eirean Facebook group An Faobhar - Scythe Group Ireland which already has 188 members! Susanne although not a scyth tutor has nevertheless has set up an event for International Peening Day, here's hoping that it will be well attended.

### STORE YOUR MEMORIES

This year I have managed to get The Windrow published before IPD which means that those who perhaps don't know about these early events will get a chance to attend. I am very grateful to those who contributed articles this issue is very rich in quality content. I'm sure you are all relieved there isn't yet another about peening jigs but never fear I have one saved up for the next issue! For me it's never too soon for me to start asking for articles for the next issue. So, store up this new seasons memories of your scything experiences and commit them to (these days, virtual) paper and send them too [itchka@compuserve.com](mailto:itchka@compuserve.com) where I will greet them with open arms!

### GREEN SCYTHE FAIR

#### *A New Competition*

This years Green Scythe Fair will feature a new scything event where all those attending courses will be invited to participate in their own competition. I don't have the details yet but I'm sure it will be fun and will give some insight to the spectators just how skillful the top mowers really are.

#### *A Vote of Thanks*

For many years Gill Barron has provided sustenance to the volunteers who set up and manage the fair as well as those who have attended the two scything courses. From her kitchen located in the scything marquee she has magiced up hearty and nourishing food which with her openhearted ways have encouraged and built our scything community. Do not underestimate the effort that is required to run a field kitchen, it is a huge task and now that Gill has stopped running it we owe her grateful thanks for her years of service on behalf of the scything community. I'm sure we all hope that she will now be able to sit back and enjoy the company of the community she helped build. *The Green Scythe community*

C.H.C.



## Ditch Blades: A Review

by

*Richard Brown*



This review compares four blades designed for tougher scythe work cutting rough vegetation up to and including brambles, tree suckers and saplings. I am already very familiar with the two Styria blades and have used them both regularly for many years. Their inclusion in this review for me is as much as benchmarks against which to judge the two Falci blades which are both new to me. I took all four blades out in mid-October to two local reserves that I help manage by scythe. The reserves include a diversity of rough vegetation including coarse tussocky grasses, reeds, brambles, wild clematis

(old man's beard), hemlock and thistles. Within each area that I chose to mow I cut a series of small sections, changing blades frequently, and rotating back and forth between the four blades to compare the feel of each and try to gauge for myself what each blade type seemed best suited to.

I used coarser Baryonyx 'Bull Thistle' and 'Artic Fox' whetstones for honing (as a trial for these stones which I acquired recently). I would usually take a coarse Silicar whetstone to such jobs when using ditch blades. The Baryonyx stones performed very well.



**Falci 187 'Ditch' Blade : weight 510g, thickness 0.7mm**

This blade was recommended to me by Michelle of scythe Cymru as a versatile blade with a strong shape, a deep belly and a classic strong Falci tang. I have to say I was impressed with this blade.

Like the very similar feature on styria ditch blades it is there to protect the blade from stubbing its toe on obstacles like stones and bricks; it did well in this regard as one would expect.



From the start it felt good to mow with, it has a smooth action and cut well in all the vegetation types I tried it in, from tough and tall, to laid and tangled. Although it is only a short 55cm blade it seemed to be able to mow above its class, feeling more like a 65cm blade. At the end of the trial session, I found myself choosing to use this blade to finish off areas. Another small feature I liked was the stone point.

The shape and position of the Falci 187 stone point (bottom in photo) is subtly different from that on Styria blades (top): it is finer and positioned further back almost behind the line of the rib. I found myself using this quite a lot, almost like a single tined rake to gather and lift laid stems in front of the cutting edge – a bit like a crop lifter does in laid crops for a combine harvester.



**55cm Styria 'Ditch' Blade 408g, 0.8mm**

In size, style and robustness the 55cm Styria is equivalent to the Falci 185. The feel is however somewhat different. The radius of curvature of the cutting edge on the Styria 55cm is quite a bit tighter with more of a hook as compared to the Falci 185. As a result, the 55 Styria mows best in tight arcs close in to your body, and indeed it needs this to get a good slicing action.

This makes this blade the better choice for nimbly mowing in areas with restricted width such as paths and between trees; it was originally designed for

mowing around vines.

The hooked curvature, almost sickle like, also makes it a good tool for grabbing and hooking out tough weeds when trimming and weeding allotments and gardens. It is not such a good blade for mowing grass, so its best qualities lean it towards being a specialist blade.

This 55cm styria ditch blade when paired with a good grassland blade means that between the two you are equipped with the optimum blade combination to cover the widest range of tasks.



**65cm Styria 'Ditch' Blade 436g, 0.8mm**

This is one of the most popular choices of blade as a universal single blade as it can tackle a variety of mowing tasks satisfactorily. With its robust ditch blade conformation, it is most suitable for mowing rough grassland; which is what a lot of people face, particularly on sites with a history of neglect or poor grassland management.

The extra 10cm it has over the 55cm version gives it a greater depth of cut and so a faster work rate. Its longer edge profile makes it easier to get a reasonable result mowing well managed grass and meadows if peened well. Its main limitation I feel is that it is not

as good as a longer 75cm grass blade for mowing good grass and meadows, nor is it as nimble for mowing tight spaces as a shorter 55cm blade. As a universal blade it is somewhat a compromise between these two types.

I do actually use my 65 Styria blade quite a bit, and find as part of a three-blade set It is useful for jobs that fall between those better suited to a 55cm ditch blade or my 75cm grass blade. The 65 for example is very useful on more open rough embankments, also handy for mowing sites where there may be hidden obstacles which could damage my best peened grass blade.





**55cm Falci Bear Bush blade 654g, 1.3mm**

The Falci Bear, like Fux bush blades, is a heavy-duty version of the ditch blade.

Bush blades are sometimes described as a light bill hook attachment for a scythe for chopping out woody stems of brambles, as well as tree suckers and saplings up to about 20mm in diameter. Their blades are almost twice as thick as regular blades. They are not really designed or suited to mowing grass.

Personally, I am not a great fan of the Bush blade concept. My feeling has always been that ditch blades are quite capable of dealing with one year growth of brambles and saplings, and that beyond this the scythe is not really the most appropriate tool choice, and Austrian snaths are not really designed to be strong enough for such heavy-duty applications.

When cutting woody stems with a scythe it is difficult not to leave a short stump which will come back to haunt you. It either leaves a stout persistent woody peg that you will hit and damage your grass blade next season, or worse, regrow as a coppice with multi stems and a woody expanding base. I would look to an alternative tool such as loppers (cutting close to the

ground), or to be thorough and prevent regrowth, a mattock to grub stems out at root level.

On this basis I have never had the urge, or a task, that has prompted me to unwrap a 40cm Fux ditch blade and try it out myself. The longer 55cm Falci Bear Bush blade however has a more refined profile, its look and feel were enough for me to want to try it out. In the field the Falci Bear does feel more like a scythe than a billhook on a long stick, and it was possible to mow with it (rather than cut or hack). It felt more assertive than a ditch blade in patches of mixed vegetation which included woodier material like brambles and old man's beard. The extra weight in the blade provided both momentum and stiffness to the stroke, the blade was less prone to bouncing back of tough springy stems. Overall however, the result was not as neat as that produced with a ditch blade on the same mixed task.

The Falci Bear was good for knocking back more established bramble patches on the margins. The extra momentum of the heavier blade also worked well when I used it for cutting reeds in winter.



**26"(66cm) Issac Nash 'best crown' Briar blade 1027g, 1.8mm**

Working with the heavier and more assertive Falci blade in tough vegetation, got me wondering how an even heavier vintage English Briar blade would compare.

To get the answer to this question I restored an Isaac Nash Briar blade from my collection. The blade I chose was equivalent in size and shape to a Styria 65cm ditch blade, but at over 1kilo more than twice the weight and thickness. This blade will be over 50 years old. Best

crown' blades were forged from a laminated sandwich of steel with "a core of shear steel covered with a very ductile iron" (Nash catalogue description). The harder thin steel core is able to "carry a superlative cutting edge" but is more brittle so needs the support of the softer more malleable outer layers. When honed the softer steel covering is readily removed to expose the cutting edge core. These blades will not withstand peening (the core is not malleable and will crack); the edge profile must be ground.

To restore the blade I

- removed surface rust mechanically (grinding disc and wire brush)
- reshaped the cutting edge to take out irregularities and achieve a smooth involute curve
- adjusted the tang in my bucket forge to fit my Fux snath
- ground the primary bevel on a slow speed water grindstone
- treated residual rust (jenolite) and gave the body of the blade a thin protective coat of paint
- honed the edge with a series of whetstones to get the "superlative cutting edge"



I chose to fit the blade to my regular Fux snath as this would make for a better comparison of blades without changing the variable of snaths; and also, as I do not have an English snath that really suits me and my mowing style.

The Nash Briar blade mows as well as a 65cm ditch blade or the Falci Bear. Carrying the additional weight is not an issue when the blade is running on the ground. The heavier blade however does have a different feel during the stroke which necessitates a

slight change in mowing style. The weight does require more energy to accelerate it at the start of the stroke but then has more momentum to carry it through tough patches and tussocks (a bit like heavy flywheel keeps a wheel turning), and so is less prone to stalling. If you can swing the blade with a pendulum cadence, and let the weight do the work, it feels quite manageable. It probably performs best when you can maintain this momentum and so is not as nimble as a lighter weight ditch blade for stop-start trimming.

## SABI Winter Gathering January 2023 - Meeting Notes

In person at:

Heritage Harvest, Collings Hanger Farm, Prestwood Bucks, HP16 0HP  
and on-line by Zoom  
**2pm 28<sup>th</sup> January 2023**

Present: Richard Brown, Andi Rickard, Colin Close, Beth Tilston, Chris Riley, Charlotte, Nichole, James, Phil Batten, John Letts, Simon Fairlie and Gill Barron, and Jim McVittie.

By Zoom: Chris Hayes, Sarah Robinson, Adrian Thomas, Kevin Austen, Mary Ellis, Michelle Laine, Suzanne Raven, Steve Tomlin, Andrew Halliday and Mark Allery

**Welcome from Richard (Brown)** – Thank you to John Letts for once again hosting the winter gathering. Thank you to Michelle (Laine) for organising and hosting the zoom facility which enables a wide participation of members. Especially good to have Chris (Hayes), Andrew (Halliday) and Suzanne (Raven) with us (on zoom) from Ireland, both North and South, for this gathering.

For those who have not previously attended a winter gathering (or read the notes) the meeting is intended to be less formal than the AGM, following a standard agenda to give it some structure while also providing an opportunity to discuss and review progress with the aims and objectives of the association.

**[1] Apologies:** Jeremy Hastings, David Keugler, Danny and Helene.

### **[2] Matters arising and minutes of the last meeting:**

There were no matters arising and the last minutes (winter gathering 2022) were accepted.

**[3] Treasurers Update (Chris Riley):** Interim report. Assets £6219 bank, £1103 nohex acct, approx £100 in cash and a cheque for £138. Total assets £7000+ up from 4471 last year and up by nearly £2500. Massive thanks to Mary for sending reminders and the vast majority of subscriptions have been online. Expenses have not been much in 2022 - £100 for blade guards, bank charge £72 and some stationery.

**[4] Membership Update (Mary Ellis):** New members 48 which includes 2 gifted memberships to contributors Hannah and Jo, plus lifetime memberships to Simon and Gill. There have been 93 renewals with 130 reminders sent out and only 6 cancelling for various reasons – membership renewal is optional so members are not taken off the list if renewal not paid unless people ask to be removed.

Irish Membership. Members paying from Ireland have to convert from Euros to Pounds to make payment. Which is not simple and represents a barrier to taking part. It's also unclear how Irish participation can be best supported from the UK. It has been suggested that the financial side might not be the most important and perhaps a way might be found for Irish subs to be paid and used in Ireland?

Suzanne gave a short update on progress in Ireland. There has been an online meeting recently and things are beginning to be happening. There is teaching happening around Ireland. Not all teachers have yet responded to invitations, hopefully they will join in. Chris added that he has been selling scythes now for a few years, and in 2022 sold around 35 - 40 the best year for a while. Also it looks as if there will be more courses taking place in 2023 which is positive.

Those present from Ireland agreed with the suggestion of managing memberships and subscriptions within Ireland provided that a way could be found to manage the finances. Suzanne asked if some membership buttons/pins could be provided.

**Action: Suzanne will stay in touch with Mary regarding Irish membership arrangements**

Finance: It would be good to be able to make (Irish) subscriptions in Euros and utilise the funds to promote participation in Ireland. Effectively help it to become self-standing. It's not yet clear how to achieve this without placing too much of a burden on someone in Ireland.

**Action: Chris/Richard to put forward a proposal for management of Irish funds in Euros.**

### **[5] Annual Review of SABI Key aims, Achievements and Way Forward**



**[6] Communication**

[a] Website. Richard is maintaining the website which currently works well and maintains a presence for scything and SABI online. The site could be updated/improved but has to be balanced against breaking something that's working and the resources needed to do the work – at the moment it's good enough.

[b] Windrow magazine. Colin (Close) the editor requests any and all contributions. These can be as much about the environment, the people and social context as the techniques and kit. Particularly looking for articles on the involvement of younger generations – the future of scything.

There are about a dozen members that need hard copies by post and are unable to download and post. These are not a lot in the scheme of things and Chris (Riley) has been taking care of photocopying and posting hardcopies and will keep doing this.

**Action: All - Upcoming Windrow issue deadline – mid March.**

[c] Facebook and Google groups. Richard summarised the current status of the Facebook page. Facebook is not for detailed conversations but it does provide a way to keep people engaged with photos and updates and it is quite active. It is somewhat limited in scope and could perhaps benefit from more informative posts. Simon (Fairlie) asked whether the usage of the googlegroup (emails) is assessed. Richard commented that it is lower than it used to be and tends to be sporadic as it is no longer the preferred method of online interaction. Mary (Ellis) said that members are added to the group when they join (unless they ask not to be) but does not expect that members under 35 are likely to check email regularly. Colin suggested that Facebook posts could be linked to the email, Andy (Rickard) responded that might be the quickest way to lose those still using email. Beth (Tilston) commented that email still has a role and Simon asked that important information is put onto the emails as well on social media. This should help to improve the relevance of email communications.

[d] *Regional contacts*. The list of contacts has not been updated for some time. After some discussion it is not clear that it is able to be used via the website as originally intended. Most enquiries will be handled by teachers and demonstrators. If the regional contacts are removed then the national contact may get more use. The general view seemed to be that it would be better to remove the regional contact list than to have one

that's out of date and it not used very well.

**Action: Richard to remove the regional contacts page.**

**[7] To promote the use of the scythe throughout Britain**

[a] Website. Charlotte (Oliver) asked whether the website provides clear enough contact for media engagement. Richard (Brown) responded that there could be more for media/press enquiries particularly more content.

**Action: Richard to look at a specific contact location for press/media within the website and for links to suitable content to be included when they are uploaded.**

Mary has been working on an open spreadsheet for who provides which services and where which would be updated by the members. This would provide a more comprehensive list for those using the website to find courses, demonstrators, or contact others. Michelle said that their website regularly gets course enquiries that she refers on to the website and Nicole (Clough) said that most instructors have their own websites. Jim (McVittie) observed that there are demonstrators/trainers/organisers who don't have their own website. Mary commented that the open spreadsheet would allow those without their own website to be visible to people using the website to find contacts.

**Action: Mary to circulate the proposed spreadsheet**

Steve (Tomlin) suggested that more information could be included on the teaching page. Mary observed that one of the teachers currently listed on the teaching page is not a member and asked if this should be the case?

**Action: Mary to write to the teacher concerned asking if they would like to join SABI.**

[b] *Festivals*. Jim outlined the Festivals/events planned around the UK with events in Somerset (The Green Scythe Fair), Wales, Yorkshire, Shropshire, Worcestershire and Cambridge. The list with dates and any more information will be uploaded to the website.

**Action: Jim to provide Chris with list for uploading to website.**

*The Green Scythe Fair (GSF)* at Thorney Lakes in Somerset is the host for the Annual Scythe championships and where the AGM is held. The winter gathering is an opportunity to discuss preparations for the coming season and events. There is a separate – Scythe Event Working Group – established to assist in

the organising of the event and liaise with the Green Scythe Fair committee and Chris Riley is a member of both groups. The following is a summary of the discussion of the GSF at the winter gathering.

The recent GSF committee meeting addressed the relationships between the GSF, the scythe events, the courses and SABI. There had been an assumption that SABI organised the courses and events. Chris informed the GSF committee that this is not the case and that the group that delivers the events and courses does so as a part of the GSF particularly for the safety and insurance of the events and courses. SABI acts as a partner organisation providing help, through its members, in promoting and supporting the scythe events, through championship rules, displays, demonstrations, trophies, safety advice and providing or funding where appropriate elements of infrastructure and safety equipment. SABI has no responsibility for any of the events or activities at the GSF. The scythe events and activities are carried out by its members and non-SABI members working as a group within the GSF.

Recent improvements have reduced the overload on a few members of the crew, improved information flow around the team and feedback has been very positive. Changes to the heats, team races and demonstrations resulted in smoother running of the events on the day and more to see through the day for visitors to the GSF.

There is always more to do. With a larger team there tends to be more organisation. Under discussion this year are: improving links with the GSF, bringing the scythe courses into line with the range of other courses now offered by the GSF, links between the scythe crew and course providers, the budget and funding through the GSF, improving signage, displays within the marquee and around the scythe arena and other infrastructure and how to keep improving the event, coping with more Health and Safety while not losing the ethos or 'heart' of the event. The catering for the event has always been a special part of the event and is a huge effort by those involved particularly Gill, much appreciated by those working on the site. As the team increases so does the demand for catering. Somehow the demand always manages to exceed the supply perhaps because it's so good! Keeping the catering 'in-house' helps to reduce costs, somehow there does need to be better management of demand – perhaps through improved communication of whom the catering is for - to help reduce the load on those doing the work, but without losing the 'mingling' between all that the

mealtimes and refreshments provide. (Marks note: Simon's cheese was much missed by some this year.)

It was noted that if SABI provides support to the GSF then it would ensure that the same opportunities are made available to funding all other events throughout Britain and Ireland. Helping other events get started and become established is at least as important as continuing to support the GSF.

The Scythe Event Working Group (SEWG) will take forward the proposals made for GSF courses, events, health and safety, catering, displays, education and budget as a facilitator working with the course providers and liaising with the GSF committee to continue to improve the organisation without losing the things that make the whole event so special to everyone involved. Further detailed discussions to develop these issues would continue with the working group outside this meeting.

Scythe Guards at the GSF. Thanks to Andi Rickard for organising the scythe guards and consensus is that providing scythe guards to participants booking in at the Scythe Arena was very successful. SABI should provide the guards again in 2023.

**Action: Andi Rickard to organise scythe guards for 2023**

(c) *Local Events*. Richard (Brown) explained that the idea is a discretionary budget which needs to be applied for to support local events and that the same criteria would be used to evaluate each application. In principle funding could be provided to help events in Ireland. An application would need to be made. Jim (McVittie) asked if funding could be provided for travel eg of demonstrators/presentations? If an application is made to the committee then it will be considered.

(d) *Banners, Badges, Stickers, Flyers, Leaflets*. Gill observed that the SABI Logo is actually a stencil and she can supply the artwork as a file so it can easily be reused. Suzanne suggested it would be good to have a banner in Ireland and also some membership buttons.

**Action: Mary (Ellis) to send membership buttons/pins to Suzanne**

**Action: Someone (Gill?) to ship banner to Suzanne**

**Action: Gill to ship banner to Andrew Halliday in Belfast**

**[8] Improve mowing skills through training and the broadcast of information**



*[a] Teaching developing and networking.* Demand for courses remains high, but there is not equal provision around the country. As Beth has moved (and Mark is no longer able to teach) there is little teaching resource in the South East where there is high demand, though Mary started providing courses in Kent last year. Conversely in the South West there are more teachers and it is perhaps more competitive.

Short discussion focused upon the level of ability, knowledge and qualifications needed to teach effectively. SABI has always been clear that no qualification is required to teach scything. Ability, technical and in allied areas of conservation, hay-making and environment as well as teaching are as important, if not more so, than possession of a qualification. The Improvers' course does provide a good basis for starting to teach and SABI recommends it to those wanting to start teaching. Those who have completed the Improvers' course are marked in the courses list.

Not all those teaching are SABI members. There is a non-member on the SABI web-site (referred to above). Perhaps there could be a 'reach-out' to those teaching who are not members to bring them on-board? Richard commented that some organisations, for example wildlife groups, will often generate their own teachers to train their volunteers who may then start to teach in their own right. This and other independent teachers help to make scythe teaching more widely available and should be encouraged.

*[b] Scythe safety.* It's working. Keep on doing it. It was felt that the additional focus on safety at the 2022 GSF (sign-in to the arena, provision of blade guards, reminders) improved people's awareness and behaviour with scythes.

#### **[9] To maintain standards of manufacture and supply of scythes and ancillary equipment.**

Wholesale buying in the UK is now coordinated between Phil/Michelle, Simon, Richard and Steve which helps to reduce the burden upon Simon and also to coordinate the flow of orders to Fux where supply and availability has increasingly become an issue – thanks to increased paperwork for shipping to the UK, the impact of the lockdowns and the factory running close to capacity.

Partly as a result of this, an international scythe retailers group has emerged through contacts between those selling (and buying wholesale) scythes in various

European, North American and Antipodean countries to discuss concerns over quality and supply issues from the Fux factory. A meeting at the factory, facilitated by Christiane Laganda, has been very helpful for understanding the factory constraints and also for Fux to better understand the needs of scythe retailers, particularly western European, who are more concerned about quality and availability. Fux has been supplying high volumes of blades to some countries (eg Iran) but prices are low and payment is difficult. As volume of sales has built up in Europe and sales include a wide range of snaths and other equipment the business has become more important to Fux. This is a big change from the situation 10 years ago. Also Fux welcomed the coordination of ordering. With the factory working at or near capacity it is really helpful to know when and which blades are likely to be ordered, helping the workflow be more efficient.

Michelle suggested that quality issues could be brought to the International Scythe Retailer Group as a way to coordinate feedback to the manufacturer.

Richard reported on technical items, peening, tang angles and whetstones. The mailander whetstone is out of production. Fux has bought up the remaining stock much unfinished and it will take a while to get the stock ready for sale.

**Action: Richard to post a blog item on the SABI website on whetstones.**

#### **[10] To Promote the study of the history of the scythe and allied technologies.**

Has not been a strong point – with the exception of the Campaign for Real English Scythes. Richard has converted with his underwater scythe. Mark commented that he had the opportunity to meet with the curator of Abbeydale scytheworks in Sheffield and also with the edge-grinder working (freelance) on site as well as a fascinating look at the (limited) stores of finished and partly finished items kept at the works.

**Action: Mark (Allery) to write an article for Windrow (not clear which issue it will be).**

#### **[11] AOB**

Fux Price rises (Michelle) - be prepared for price rises which will inevitably come through.

**[12] DONM:** Will be the AGM at the Green Scythe Fair, 7pm Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> June

*28<sup>th</sup> Feb 2023, Mark Allery and all errors and omissions are mine.*