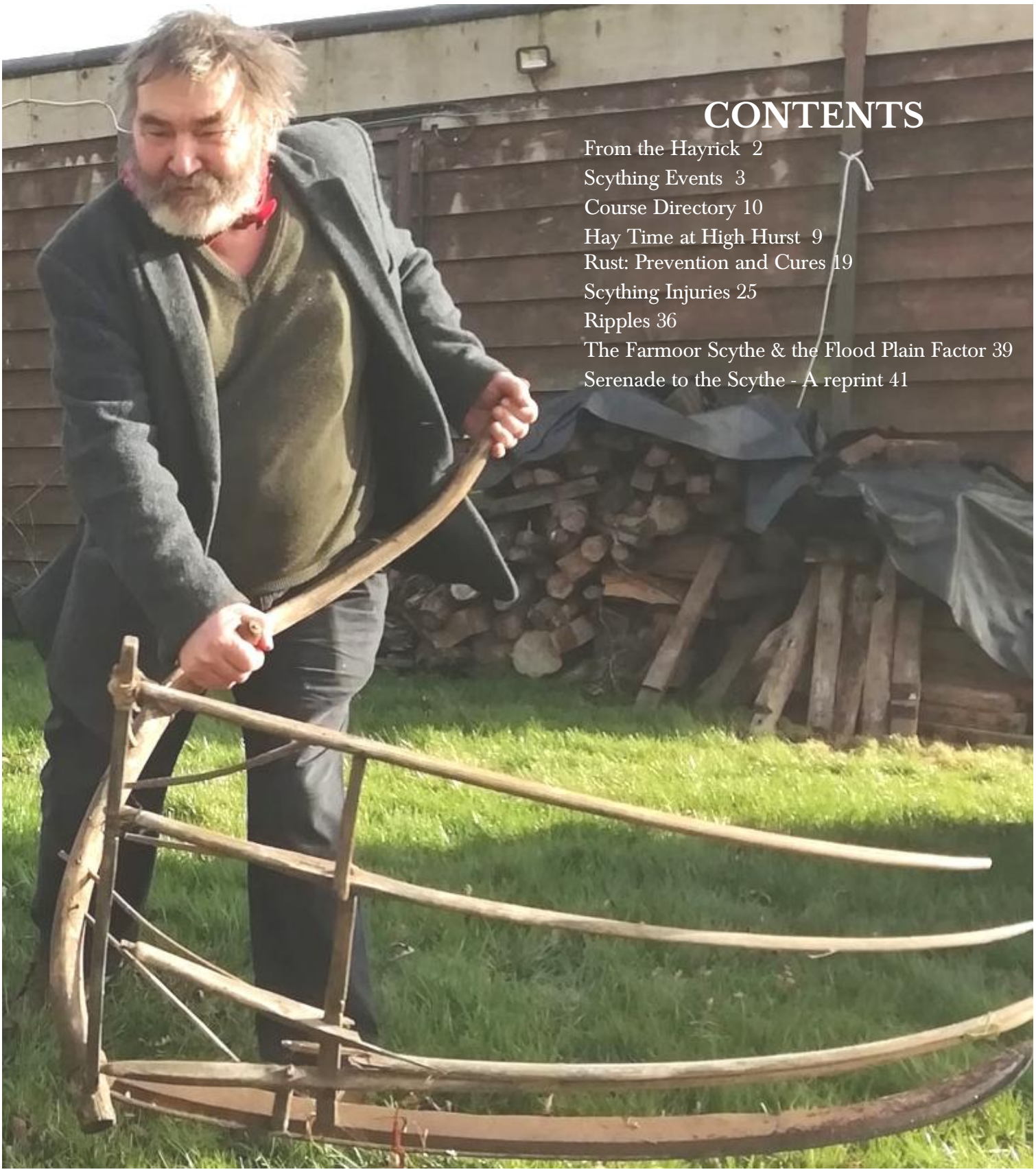
The Windrow

Windrow N0 19 April 2024

Newsletter of The Scythe Association of Britain and Ireland



CONTENTS

From the Hayrick 2
Scything Events 3
Course Directory 10
Hay Time at High Hurst 9
Rust: Prevention and Cures 19
Scything Injuries 25
Ripples 36
The Farmoor Scythe & the Flood Plain Factor 39
Serenade to the Scythe - A reprint 41

From the Hayrick

This year sees the role of SABI representative at the Green Scythe Fair committee meetings change; Chris Riley a founding member of SABI who has served this function for some years is taking a well earned rest. Thank you Chris for shepherding scything, a core part of the GSF, through all those years and helping it to become such a wonderful event. Chris is replaced by Neil Gemmel assisted by Larry Leventhal and we wish them every success.

The front cover this year features another luminary of the scything world; Simon Fairlie is pictured here at SABI's winter meeting weildng a very large cradle scythe which originated in Canada. The cradle and blade on this scythe are enormous and to wield this instrument for a day in the field would have required great strength and stamina. I hope that someday somebody more knowledgable that I will write an article about these cradles and their usage (hint, hint!).

Those of you who have taken part in the Northern Scythe festival will have enjoyed mowing on some of the best meadows in the country. This grassland has been tended by Peter Blackmore and his family over many years unfortunately Natural England has (misguidedly) withdrawn the funding that allowed them to be managed as wild flower meadows and despite the efforts of Peter Blackmore and other interested parties to reverse this decision the meadows have been turned over to commercial farming. Fortunately the Northern Scythe fair will still be held this year at Bell Sykes farm though as yet it's not known quite what the impact will be on the grass that the competitors will be mowing.

An interesting event occurred last season in that a group of scythers were invited to a property in Somerset to take part in a scything gathering which was turned into a youtube film. The group were asked to cut an area of around an acre of varied mixed grassland on a slope and while doing so we were filmed and some of us interviewed. The owners of the house and land are rewilding their entire garden for the benefit of the local wild life. You can see the film on youtube here:-
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NclmBEJoOk

You may be wondering why there is a poster (in French) for an event that has passed. I have posted it not only because I think it's very attractive but also in the hope that I can attract the attention of a budding artist in the readership who can take charge of creating the posters for SABI events. I have tried this year but they are very lack lustre so any help in this area would be gratefully received.

This season sees the restoration of the East of England Scything Championships which were orphaned from Wimpole House if you can get to that part of the world in the busy scything season please come along and compete.

Finally I'd like to send a out a plea for articles it's hard to put together an interesting newsletter without them.

If every Windrow reader wrote an article on how they came to be a scyther and why they continue as one there would be enough articles to see the retirement of this editor!!

Other possible subjects are the mowing of a particular area; I recall receiving an article titled Backbreaker Meadow. These are just a few ideas

Finally a mega thank you to those who helped out with articles for this issue. Please keep them coming.

SCYTHING EVENTS NATIONAL





The 'Real' Hay Festival
Sat 22 June 2024 2:00 pm – 9:00pm
Newchapel, Llanidloes40

Programme

Horse Hay-making demonstration 2pm - 5pm
Axe and Saw Lumberjack demo 2pm - 5 pm

Wilderness Skills with Forge Ways 2pm - 5pm
Forest Schools with Gemma 2pm - 5pm
Have-a-go Scything 2pm - 5pm
Whittling Workshop 2pm - 5pm
Historic Crafts demo 2pm - 5pm
Kids' Arty workshops 2pm - 5pm
Braid Making workshop 2pm - 4pm
Poetry in Nature w/s 2pm - 2:30pm and 3pm - 4pm
Art in Nature 2pm - 3pm
Bioblitz 2pm - 3pm
Introduction to Wildlife Recording w/s 3pm - 4pm
Plant I.d. Walk and Meadows Talk 4pm - 5pm
Freshwater Worlds Talk with Dewi 5pm - 5:30pm
Circle Dance with Plaxy 3pm - 4pm

Bar and Pizza Van 2pm till late &
lots of cool stalls!

Onstage:
Samba Band - 5:30 pm - 6:00 pm
Poetry Reading with Michelle Pearce 6pm
Klezmonauts - 6:10 pm - 7pm
Marc Harpham (music) - 7pm - 9pm

Celebrate the Summer Solstice with a range of outdoor activities: scything, working horse demos, crafts, bar and food.

This is a free event.

Location is What3words: escalates.roofs.grass

Parry'sfield Scythe Festival 15th -21st July 2024

Parry'sfield Scythe Festival







"Probably the best Scything of Flower Meadow in UK"
The Green Hay will again go to help future meadows in Herefordshire & beyond.
Camping, Walks, Talks, Live Music & a new chef every night, Pizzas, Curry, Paella,
Bring food to share, & Scything too!

If you'd love to come please contact :
David Kuegler: david.kuegler@btinternet.com
Parry'sfield, Lyston Lane Orcop Hill, Herford HR28SD

Northern Scythe Festival & Northern Scythe Chanpionships
Sat 6 and Sun 7 July 2024

Bell Sykes Farm, Slaidburn, BB7 4TP
by kind permission of Peter and Lin Blackwell



Come along on Saturday to mow some of the nicest hay meadows in the North and stay over on Sunday for the North of England Scything Championships

Basic camping available Friday, Saturday and Sunday night £10 per person per night.
Bring and share meals each evening in a communal marquee.
Bookings contact Jim McVittie
jim@mcvittie.me.uk


SCYTHING
WITH A VIEW
29TH JULY TO 2ND AUGUST 2024
A WEEK OF DROP IN SCYTHING AT
THE STIPERSTONES
NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE
IN THE HEART OF THE SHROPSHIRE HILLS
• INTRODUCTORY COURSE (BOOKING ONLY)
• SCYTHING DROP IN SESSIONS EACH DAY
• PEENING PRACTICE • MANAGEMENT ADVICE
• COMPETITION AND BBQ
Events are open to those new to scything, those wanting more practice



Back for a second year and expanded to include the Eastern Counties Scything Championships

The Wandlebury Scything Festival is becoming a premier scythe event.

Scything is a traditional rural skill that was used to cut hay. The skill is kept alive by enthusiasts and scything is still used to cut hay in small or difficult locations where using a tractor isn't possible.

Have a go at scything and watch experts in action.
From 10am-1pm there will be scything demonstrations and have-a-go sessions, so you can try your hand a scything.

Stay around for the afternoon to watch the scything championships and see how the experts do it.
Last year's winner cut a plot 5m x 5m in under two and a half minutes! The competitions will start around 2pm.

We also expect a return visit from the Grim Strimmer who will challenge a top scyther to a scything race.

Scything activities will be signposted from the car park.

SCYTHING EVENTS INTERNATIONAL

Time Traveling and Hay Making Camp in Transylvania 2024

Date: 14 July-20 July and 04 august-10 August 2024.
Location: Gyimesbükk, Áldomáspataka (Ghime -F get, Ald ma .
Organizers: Sárig Attila with his family and Carpathian Escapes
Supporters:

The Csángó people living in the Gyimes Valley possess a knowledge that represents an exceptional value for the whole of Europe. The ancient Csángós settled in a wild, remote valley in the Eastern Carpathians and in order to survive they had to develop a special life and land use style that was in harmony with nature.

Hay making is the most important activity in the Gyimes Valley because people here are mainly occupied with animal husbandry. Through decades of work they created some of the most biodiverse mountain hay meadows in the world.

The Hay Making Camp would like to introduce participants into this type of landscape-creating, nature-respecting lifestyle.

Nearly all the food served at the camp is organic because the ingredients are grown and produced by the Sárig family on their own farm by Csángó traditions. The family uses mainly human and animal power to produce food which means that machine usage is kept to a minimum. We hope that these are good reasons for our guests to spend a whole week in "Csánglia" with pleasure.

Participants at the hay making camp can contribute to the survival of this beautiful landscape that became so magical mainly because of traditional hay making. During the six days of the event participants are also invited to get a personal insight into the world and lifestyle of the Csángós.

Everybody is warmly welcome!

Planned programme
The programme is subject to change according to weather conditions!

1st Day, Sunday: in the evening everybody shall meet at the Áldomás Guesthouse in Áldomáspataka Village, Ghimes municipality for welcome and dinner.

2nd Day, Monday: 8 AM breakfast, then a local craftsman show us how to make scythes handels and wooden rakes in traditional way. 1-3 PM lunch and siesta, after that we learn how to mow the grass whit the scythes. At 7 PM dinner, after which guests from abroad are given the possibility to make a short presentation about themselves and to highlight what makes traditional lifestyle valuable.

3rd Day , Tuesday: We'll start the day early in the morning whit mowing the grass on a field next to the village. After the breakfastin a small cheese factory we learn about the cheese making procedure, than we go to pick mushrooms in the surrounding forests. After lunch we'll turning and collecting the hay that has been cut, and if we have more energy, we can continue mowing . 7 PM dinner.

4th Day, Wednesday: 6 AM Early mowing in the morning for early risers. At 9 AM we take breakfast. After breakfast we'll collect the hay mowed last day. After lunch everybody shall prepare for a hike up to the mountain hay meadow. We will make our dinner on a camp fire, and after sundown we prepare our sleeping bags and go to sleep in hay in the hay barns.

5th Day, Thursday: Early start whit mowing in the sunrise on the top of the mountain. Breakfast at 9 AM, then we'll continue mowing. After lunch we make a walk on the mountain meadow to learn about meadow biodiversity with the help of a specialist, than mowing 'til dinner time. Camp fire, sundown watch and sleeping in the hay barns in sleeping bags.

6th Day, Friday: breakfast at 8 AM; most of the day will be spent with gathering the hay, making hay stacks and pulling them to the barns, loading the hay into the barn. In the afternoon we leaves the mountain and will have dinner back at the guesthouse. After dinner evening party with local traditional music and dances.

7th Day, Saturday: breakfast at around 8 AM, followed by a short evaluation of the week, after which farewell and everybody shall head home.

Participation fee: 499 EUR/person. The fee includes simple village accommodation, breakfast, lunch, dinner and participation in the activities and programmes. Children are welcome.

Registration deadline: 01 July 2024. The number of participants is limited to a maximum of 20. A 100 EUR deposit is kindly requested upon registration.

Practical information: this is a Hungarian ethnic region, bring a Hungarian phrasebook. Be prepared for any weather – it changes quickly in the mountains, wear layers, working clothes, sturdy shoes. Gardening gloves and a sun hat and sun cream are recommended.

Please think about nature, and if you can, travel to us whit a train! Railway stations: Miercurea Ciuc, Ghimes.

Nearest airports: Bacau (99 km), Brasov (151 km), Targu Mures (200 km), Sibiu (240 km), Bucharest (293 km); If it is necessary, we can provide an airport transfer.

"Hay meadows provide an immense range of benefits to farming communities and wider society. They create some of Europe's most spectacular scenery and cultural landscapes. Simply to watch this natural, environmental and cultural heritage disappear before our eyes is, surely, not an option we can consider," said HRH the Prince of Wales in a message to our policy seminar at the European Parliament, Brussels, 2012. Watch the video at

Contact: For registration, transportation possibilities, optional tours before or after the event or any other detail please contact Sarig Attila, (aldomaspataka@gmail.com.), Tel. 0040727859882 and
Carpathian Escapes, , 0040770345948



Ill parait que l'herbe pousse plus tôt en France. See editorial

COURSE DIRECTORY

Teachers marked with an asterisk usually have scythes for sale.

East Anglia

Richard Brown,* Kings Lynn, Norfolk.
richard@wildscythe.co.uk
Website:- 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.

- Learn to scythe and grassland management courses in June July and August
- Peening and Scythe maintenance course 6th April
- see https://wildscythe.co.uk/calendar/

Midlands

Nicole Clough* Oxfordshire. www.joyofscything.uk
I provide training in the use , manintenance and joy of the Austrian scythe within Oxforshire, the nearby counties and the southern Midlands.

Please visit my website for the 2024 venue dates or to enquire about arranging a bespoke session.

Northern England

Steve Tomlin*
stevetomlin8@gmail.com stevetomlincrafts.co.uk/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. Subscribe to my newsletter https://wordpress.us3.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=156a747797e7436733ce5a8dc&id=583d183c4d for more dates.

- 25 May, Foxglove Covert LNR, N. Yorkshire
- 1 June, Bell Sykes Farm, Slaidburn, Lancashire
- 22 June, Brigflatts Meeting House, Sedbergh, Cumbria
- 21 July, Bell Sykes Farm, Slaidburn, Lancashire
- 2 August, Broadrake, Chapel-le-Dale, Yorkshire Dales
- 7 Sept, Brigflatts Meeting House, Sedbergh, Cumbria

Book your place on Eventbrite: https://www.eventbrite.com/cc/learn-to-scythe-2859659

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 to book your course.

South East England

Rachel Remnant*, Hampshire
Land Lore Consulting rachel@landloreconsulting.com
Tel 07745 977403 www.landloreconsulting.com
Learn to scythe near Winchester and Liss. Expert habitat advice, with a specialism in floodplain meadows

- 2024 courses:

An Introduction to the Austrian Scythe. Includes set up, technique, honing and peening. £85
Sunday 14th April, 10am – 4:30pm
Friday 26th April, 10am – 4:30pm
Monday 20th May, 10am – 4:30pm
Friday 21st June, 10am – 4:30pm

Mary Ellis* Kent, Sussex and Surrey southeastscything@gmail.com
Learn to scythe in a day with others, or tailored 1 to 1 tuition in scything, sharpening and peening, covering Kent, Sussex and Surrey.
Learn the joy of an ancient skill. "I have never seen anyone pick up a scythe and not smile."
Please email southeastscything@gmail.com for more info.

South West England

Adrian Thomas North Devon
Phone: 01409 282801 email: adrianthomas59@gmail.com
I run training courses for both individuals and groups either at my home in Buckland Filleigh EX21 or at a local site of your choice. I sell scythe kit and offer a blade peening service.
Please phone or email for further information.

Andi Rickard* Somerset andirickard@me.com 07581 239453
Former UK Scything Champion and current Ladies Champion. 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.
Go to www.scytheschool.com for more details and to book.

Chris Riley* North Dorset
chris@pratensis.net 07719 691312
Available for scythe training in the Wessex area, and beyond. For up-to-date information see: www.pratensis.net

- Workshops 'Meadow Management: Learn To Scythe' at Kingcombe Visitor Centre, Dorchester DT2 0EQ Fri 28th June and Sun 28th July 2024. Go to https://www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/courses-and-workshops for further details, and to book.

Simon Fairlie, Near Lyme Regis, Dorset, scythes@myphone.coop www.thescytheshop.co.uk
Two day courses on scything scythe use, haymaklng and grassland management.
Day one: basic scythe skills and peening demo; day two: meadow scything, peening practice, haymaking and grassland management.
18th - 19th May 2024
20th - 21st July 2024

Single day attendance possible. Complete range of scythes available to buy at a discount. One-to-one tuition available by appointment.

Kevin Austin* Cornwall
Phone: 07943653825 email: 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.
Beginners Courses on
Saturday 4th May 10.00-4.00 pm
Saturday 11th May 10.00-4.00 pm
Saturday 18th May 10.00-4:00 pm
Saturday 25th May 10:00-4:00 pm
Single, couples or groups, tailored for beginners or improvers.
See : www.skyegrove.co.uk for more details.

Ross Adams* South Devon 07811 608359
Email ross@abundantgardens.uk Website www.abundantgardens.uk/courses
I run fun and informative courses covering everything needed to get you mowing efficiently and effectively. I have courses for beginners and improvers, I also offer 1-1's, 1-2's and I can run a course on your land. For more information have a look at my website.

Jeremy Weiss*, South Devon. jeremy@properedges.com 07962 432317
Here at Proper Edges we run courses for beginners and improvers near Totnes, South Devon. We can also run courses on your land or for local groups and organisations and offer one to one tuition.
For a list of upcoming courses see our website: https://properedges.com/courses/

Wales & Borders

David Kuegler*, Parrysfield, Orcop Hill, HR2 8SD Hereford
david.kuegler@btinternet.com https://www.instagram.com/parrysfieldorcop/
Courses cover all aspects of Scything in a fun filled day, either Parrysfield or your meadow
I sell fully prepared Scythe Kits: oiled, peened & sharp!, plus hay rakes & hay forks, & beautiful Peening ponies too!

- 1:1 Courses anytime/anywhere to suit March-December
- Group Courses up to six scythers, every second Saturday of the month March-October

Simon Cooter* Shropshire Tel: 01743 792294: Simon.Cooter@naturalengland.org.uk
Site manager for the Stiperstones National Nature Reserve, courses are usually run from the nature reserve base where practice can be carried out on a variety of vegetation and slopes. All proceeds go to the management of the nature reserve.

- Introductory Scything and meadow management course, Sunday 7th July, 10am - 4pm. £60.00pp
- Introductory Scything and meadow management course, Monday 29th July, 10am - 4pm. £60.00pp (followed by optional free scything sessions all week)

Danny Hodgson & Helene Ducrotoy, Llanidloes, hand.powered@yahoo.com
Working throughout Mid-Wales and across the UK, visit
www.handpowered.co.uk/events-courses for details.





Phillip Batten* Dyfed Permaculture Farm Trust, Carmarthenshire
info@scythecymru.co.uk
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. See www.scythecymru.co.uk for details

Andrea Gilpin*, Presteigne, Powys 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. 12+ Years experience. Meadow management advice given.

Beth Tilston* Forest of Dean
Flaxley, Forest of Dean:
Contact 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.
Courses on 28th May and 16th July

One to ones available in Blakeney, 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,
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.

Heather Beaton, Lochalsh, heather.beaton@lochash.uk

Scythe courses run on the community land of the Plock. One-day courses cover the basics in scythe set up, peening and sharpening and mowing. One to one courses can be arranged, as can courses at a location of your choice. All proceeds go to community projects within Lochalsh.

Ireland

Neil Foulkes, Co Leitrim, Ireland
neilfoulkes62@gmail.com
Formal and informal workshopos 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
I run scythe clinics for individuals or small groups of people. I also offer scythe mowing and peening services and can provide information regarding scything in Ireland.

You're welcome to join the facebook group An Faobhar – Scythe Group Ireland:
https://www.facebook.com/groups/215248119929200
For more information visit http://www.susanneraven.ie/

Chris Hayes Wexford, Ireland
temujinhayes@gmail.com 087 1226266
https://www.scythe.ie/
I have been scything for over ten years and run courses all over Ireland. Regular courses at Irish Seed Savers – https://irishseedsavers.ie/workshops/
Online sales and course enquiries for Wexford and beyondCourses cover introduction to scything and peening. Contact for other dates

National

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

Steve Tomlin* Manchester
stevetomlin8@gmail.com
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 07581 239453
Former UK Scything Champion, and current Ladies Champioin. Beginners and Improvers courses throughout the summer from April through October.Group courses and private bookings.Courses held at Mower Meadow in South Somerset. (Camping available).I can also teach at your venue.Go to www.scytheschool.com for more details and to book.

Andrea Gilpin* Powys
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 advise on meadow management. Clients include Wildlife Trusts, The National Trust, RSPB and many community groups.

Danny Hodgson & Helene Ducatroy*, 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 https://www.handpowered.co.uk for details

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.

Chris Riley* North Dorset
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

Online

Beth Tilston* Forest of Dean
https://cloudcottageland.vhx.tv
A new 30 minute course available online. Covering everything I go into on my day course.
Pay what you want – you decide what you want to pay for it.

THE GREEN SCYTHE FAIR

Incorporating

The 18th West Country Scythe Festival

Sun 9 June 2024 11.00 am – 11.00 pm
Thorney Lakes, Somerset TA10 0DW

This is a ticket only event please
go here for tickets and more information
http://www.greenfair.org.uk

To avoid disappointment
book now as numbers are limited
There are no tickets at the gate.

The SCYTHE Improvers Masterclass



7th and 8th June 2024
at the GREEN SCYTHE FAIR, Somerset

Join our three highly
EXPERIENCED TUTORS

Phil Batten	Andi Rickard	Kev Austin
Master Peener from Scythe Cymru	UK Champion Somerset Scythe School	Former UK Champion from Cornwall

and learn to Scythe and Peen with greater
CONFIDENCE & EASE

MORE INFO / ENQUIRES
scythemasterclass@gmail.com
Aimed at people who already use an AUSTRIAN SCYTHE at home, work or in a volunteer setting.

THE PREMIER SCYTHING EVENT IN THE UK

Scythe championship,
Scythe and haymaking events
Speakers
Crafts
Stalls
Music
Kids area
Local food and drink

A variety of other courses are available on Saturday 8th June. See the ticketing site for details.

Advance ticket sales only.

Learn to Scythe at Wandlebury Country Park Wandlebury Ring, Gog Magog Hills, Cambridge CB22 3AE Saturday 20 July, 10am - 4pm



The lightweight Austrian scythe is an excellent tool for managing areas such as wildflower meadows and around trees.

You will learn how to select and set up a scythe to suit your stature and the basics of mowing and sharpening. There will be ample time to practise and you should be a confident mower by the end of the day.

The course will be taught by Richard Brown a professional scythe tutor (www.wildscythe.co.uk) assisted by other skilled scythers.

The cost for the day is £75 per person including the hire of scythe equipment for the day. Please tell us your height when booking so that we can ensure that we have a suitable scythe available. Scythes will also be available to buy on the day.

Tea and coffee are provided but please bring your own refreshments and packed lunch. We will, of course, be working outside so wear outdoor clothing and dress for the weather.

To Book your Place Go to:-

https://www.cambridgeppf.org/Event/learn-to-scythe-jul-2024

Hay Time at High Hirst

By

Neil Diment

How Scythers are helping Hebden Royd Town Council in West Yorkshire restore an ancient hay meadow as a key part of its Climate Emergency and Biodiversity Action Plan.

It was a random Facebook post back in 2021 that first alerted me to the 'High Hirst Woodmeadow Project' near my new home town of Hebden Bridge in the South Pennines. Hebden Royd Town Council(HRTC) had just announced an exciting new project which it hoped would create a unique habitat to benefit local people, nature and the environment. It wanted to 'do something tangible' in response to the climate mergency and biodiversity loss.

Reading on, I learned that HRTC had leased the four-acre field from Calderdale Council. Around one acre of it had already been planted with native trees back in 2014 by local group 'Treesponsiblity', with help from local schoolchildren to create what would become a hazel coppice.With a grant from rom the Woodland Trust, over 850 hedgerow plants had more recently been planted all around the boundary, making the field stock proof. A small copse of willow had also been planted in a boggy part of the field, with the intention that that too would be coppiced in the future and harvested for willow revetments – structures used to help slow water flow and reduce flood risk in the Calder valley below.



A view of High Hurst Woodmeadow after the first 3 days mowing

With a background in hay meadow restoration gained while working for the North Pennines AONB and a keen scyther myself, my interested was piqued. Here was something where I felt I could usefully apply some of my skills and knowledge and offer some help!

Inspirations

Much of this early work I learnt had been inspired by the work of the charity and a visit to their Three Hagges Woodmeadow near York by Councillor Nikki Harvey, the chair of the Town Council's initiative. I read more about woodmeadows, a lesser known habitat in the UK but once common in Scandinavia and the Baltic countries. The messy edges between woodland and meadow offer niches for a wealth of species. The combined areas of native woodland and flower-rich meadows are exceptionally rich in life – more than 60 flora species per square metre have been recorded in some existing woodmeadows in northern Europe.

diverse meadow habitat was clear.

As a veteran of haymeadow restoration projects both in the UK and abroad, this was something I could get stuck into and wield my scythe again! Working alongside Steve Hindle, we drew up an outline management plan to restore the upland hay meadow to something like the wildflower meadow it once was. The 80 or so heritage fruit trees were subsequently planted around the edge of the meadow, and in the least diverse area towards the top of the field.



Cllr Nikki Harvey and NT's Steve Hindle at International PeeningDay at eth Fox & Goose pub, Hebden Bridge

Taking stock

A community orchard was also planned but before that work could begin, a botanical site survey of the whole field had been undertaken in 2020 by Steve Hindle, the National Trust's Ancient Grasslands Officer based at nearby Hardcastle Crags. This had identified several of the characteristic ancient meadow indicators I was familiar with such as pignut, wood anemone, yellow rattle and sweet vernal grass – and this despite the field not having been actively managed in many years. The site's potential as a rich and

A Field of Flowers

I spoke to longstanding local residents and farmers about the history of the field. One former neighbour remembered the site as a 'field of flowers' many years ago. My experience had taught me that the best way to approach a restoration towards establishing such a sight again initially, is to try and replicate the farming methods that produced it in the first place.
With that aim in mind, sheep were welcomed back on to the site that autumn, and returned again the following spring, 2022. A two-day beginners scything

course was organised to try to recruit and train some local volunteers to mow the meadow, and Steve Tomlin agreed to run it for us.
For two weeks that summer we managed to mow most of the lower part of the field, and made hay - when the sun occasionally shone! - with much help too from the local Dodd Naze community which borders the top of the field. We finished with - what else? - a traditional Hay Time Tea. Everyone who had helped during the previous two weeks was encouraged to return and bring their families too to celebrate our achievements. As we raised glasses and thanked everyone for their efforts, and finished off the last of our refreshments, it became clear to me that we were not just restoring a meadow. We were also recreating that 'community endeavour' I'd heard and learnt so much about from the 'old haytimers' in Teesdale I had interviewed in my research into hay meadow management for the North Pennines AONB[1].





Encouraging Signs
Steve Hindle repeated his survey the following spring, 2023. Already there were small but encouragingly positive signs that we were moving in the right direction. The survey showed that there had been an increase in yellow rattle, an annual which needs a relatively open sward for its seeds to germinate. In Steve's expert view, 'this increase showed that the new management was changing the distribution of grasses, leading to better conditions for annuals'. While acknowledging that the spread of indicator species is a slow process, 'improved management will allow the latent seed to germinate and perennials to become stronger, and this appears to be happening'. 2
Further encouragement was to follow when Steve Tomlin agreed to come back again to run a one day Scything Refresher Course in the summer. Our team of volunteer scythers set out to mow the meadow again, honing not just their scything techniques but also our use of a wheelie bin (as seen on You Tube) to make our hay bales! We managed to mow over half of the meadow, nearly doubling the number of hay bales

produced too.
A fungi survey that Steve Hindle organised with our volunteers that autumn revealed an incredible number and range of fungi species in the sward. As well as the characteristic wax caps, and several others officially classified as 'threatened' on the UK's Red Data list, this also included one so rare - a previously unnamed species from the 'fanvault' family - related to a couple of single specimens that have only been found in two other places, one in Wales, the other Slovakia, in the world before.

mow the whole meadow this year!
And so, towards that end, we are putting a call out to readers of Windrow and other scythers in the wider scything community to come and join us - for a day, or longer if you can - to help us achieve our aim. Steve Tomlin has kindly agreed to return to run another scything refresher course for us, and then for two weeks - from Sunday 21st July to Sunday 4th August inclusive - we will be out scything and making hay from around 9am each day till dusk, weather



Thanks to our combined efforts to date, our seemingly unremarkable little field in 'Happy Valley' has been officially recognised by Calderdale Council as a 'Local Wildlife Site'. This should, at the very least, afford it greater protection for the future.
And thanks, too, to the range and number of different types of flora and fungi species we have identified in our surveys since we began our meadow restoration work, we are close to attaining the status equivalent to a 'Site of Special Scientific Interest'.

This Meadow Needs You!

But there's to be no resting on our laurels! This year we have set our sights on trying to mow the whole meadow. We gathered at our local community pub recently on 'International Peening Day' again in April to sharpen both our scythes and our resolve to try and

permitting. We plan to celebrate with a Hay Time Tea at the top of the meadow again on the final Sunday afternoon.

Do come and join us if you can. You will be very welcome, and your help and support will be very much appreciated. If you do think of coming, please don't hesitate to contact the author who will able to advise on accommodation if you plan to stay for more than a day, and parking if you are coming by car. Hebden Bridge is a lively former mill town, well connected by bus and rail, and the meadow is just a short bus ride from the station, or a 15 minute walk through the town ... or maybe longer if you're diverted along the way by the wide choice of cafés for some coffee and cake on offer!
For further details please contact Neil Diment,

email@ndiment.co.uk or mobile: 07821 620680.

[1] 'No five o'clock on our calendars' - A history of hay time in the North Pennines,
edited by Rebecca Barrett & Neil Diment. Published by the North Pennines AONB, 2011.
[2] 'Botanical Survey, Condition Report and Management Advice for High Hirst Wood Meadows', Steve Hindle, June 2023



Rust - prevention and cures.

By

Richard Brown

To state the obvious, scythe blades are made from steel. They are not stainless, and in the main do not have protective coatings (except residues of the factory applied paint and lacquer). Bare steel exposed to water and air quickly rusts and this corrosion is accelerated if the moisture contains salts. As the normal working environment for a scythe blade includes all these elements: moisture and air plus mineral salts from the soil, rusting is inevitable.

A scythe blade does not need to be exposed to rain or left wet after mowing grass to corrode. Rust can develop on bare steel in storage starting where the relative humidity in the air is above 50 - 60% and accelerating when the RH rises above 70% as the risk of surface condensation rises. This is pretty much the conditions inside any unheated shed in a damp British winter.

The purpose of this review is firstly to look at different strategies and products for preventing rust corrosion of scythe blades. Secondly, to try different approaches to removing rust and restoring blades that have corroded.The first and most important thing to do is always wash your blade in clean water to remove dirt, especially soil salt contamination, and then dry it with a cloth and/or paper towel. Do this immediately after every session: surface rust can begin to form within hours if not minutes.

To protect your blade from moisture in the air between use coat your blade with a thin smear of light oil such as WD40 or olive oil. From day-to-day you don't want to use a sticky heavy oil which might contaminate your whetstone. For longer term storage however, especially over a damp winter, you might find you need a more persistent oil as protection from the light oils mentioned above does not last. If you use a heavier oil you will need to wash it clean with detergent before the next use of a whetstone (see protection options below). Tip: do not store your blade with the red plastic edge guard attached as these become a trap for moisture and condensation promoting rust along the most important part of your blade: the cutting edge!

If you follow this blade hygiene you should never have an issue with rust, and with repeated cleaning you will produce a blade that just gets more uniformly shinier with age.

Rust protection options

As mentioned above for day-to-day rust protection I usually reach for the WD40 can, or occasionally olive oil. In this circumstance I am looking for something that is quick to apply, does not leave a lasting residue that might contaminate my whetstone, and will protect against rust for a few days (or weeks in summer). I avoid heavier oils and particularly do not apply linseed oil which dries to a skin which is then difficult to remove (great for wood but not blades).

For winter storage I have generally used engine oil, whatever I happen to have to hand in my workshop. This seems to give lasting rust protection over the winter in my workshop, where WD40 definitely does not. I wash oiled blades in detergent in spring before honing.

On one of my courses a pupil bought to my attention a number of specialist products designed to protect metal parts on motorbikes from rusting, especially in winter on salted roads. Having read some internet reviews of

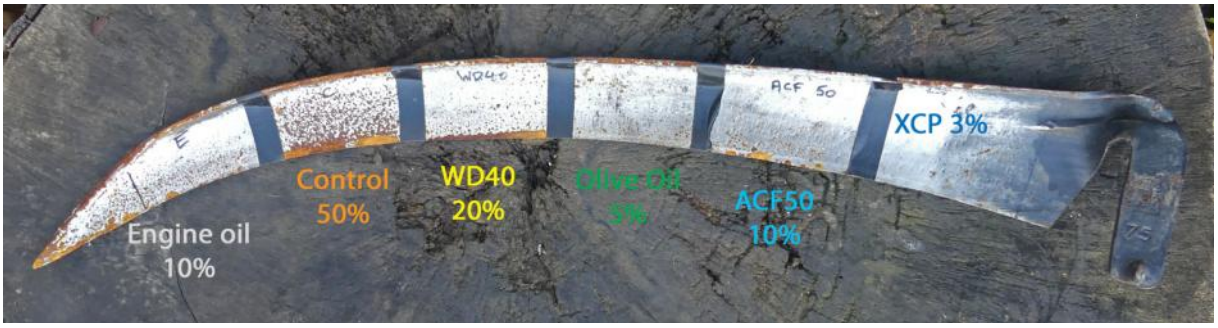


these products I decided to conduct my own experiment with a selection of products to see how they performed. I treated different sections of a clean bare metal, new (but faulty), scythe blade with a range of protective



treatments. I then hung it outside of my scythe workshop for a year exposed to the weather. One section was left bare as a control. I monitored the

What happens when you leave a pristine scythe blade outside exposed to the elements for a whole year?

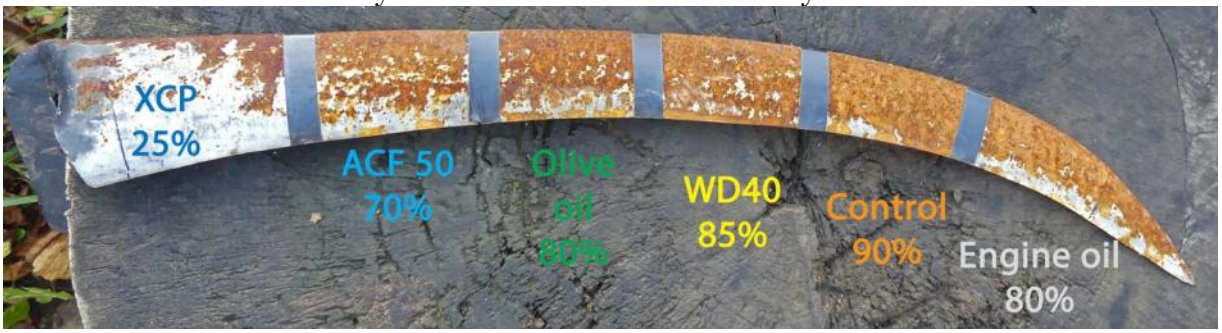


blade over the year through all four seasons: autumn winter spring and summer.

Well, no surprise the blade goes rusty, but not evenly, and not completely, even in the control unprotected section. I was surprised at how slowly the outward facing parts of the blade rusted. Where I have seen dirty blades start to

metal surfaces ready for the experiment, including a final wipe with alcohol to remove any residual traces of protective oil or grease. The blade was hung vertically on a south facing wall. Whilst it did get wet when it rained, and it was exposed to mist and high humidity, it drained and dried quickly and also rain droplets are relatively pure (salt free) and do not promote rust corrosion as much as dirty water.

Even after a year the outward face of the blade was still



largely free of rust with only the unprotected control section with significant rust.

The inward facing face of the blade did not fare so well; it stayed damper for longer against the wall and may have had some salt spatter off the bricks. The top of the blade along the rib, which was horizontal, rusted most.
On this face all the protective treatments broke down after a year allowing rust except the XCP.
1The progression of the rust and durability of the protectants varied over the year.

In my assessment the products I investigated seemed to fall into three classes:

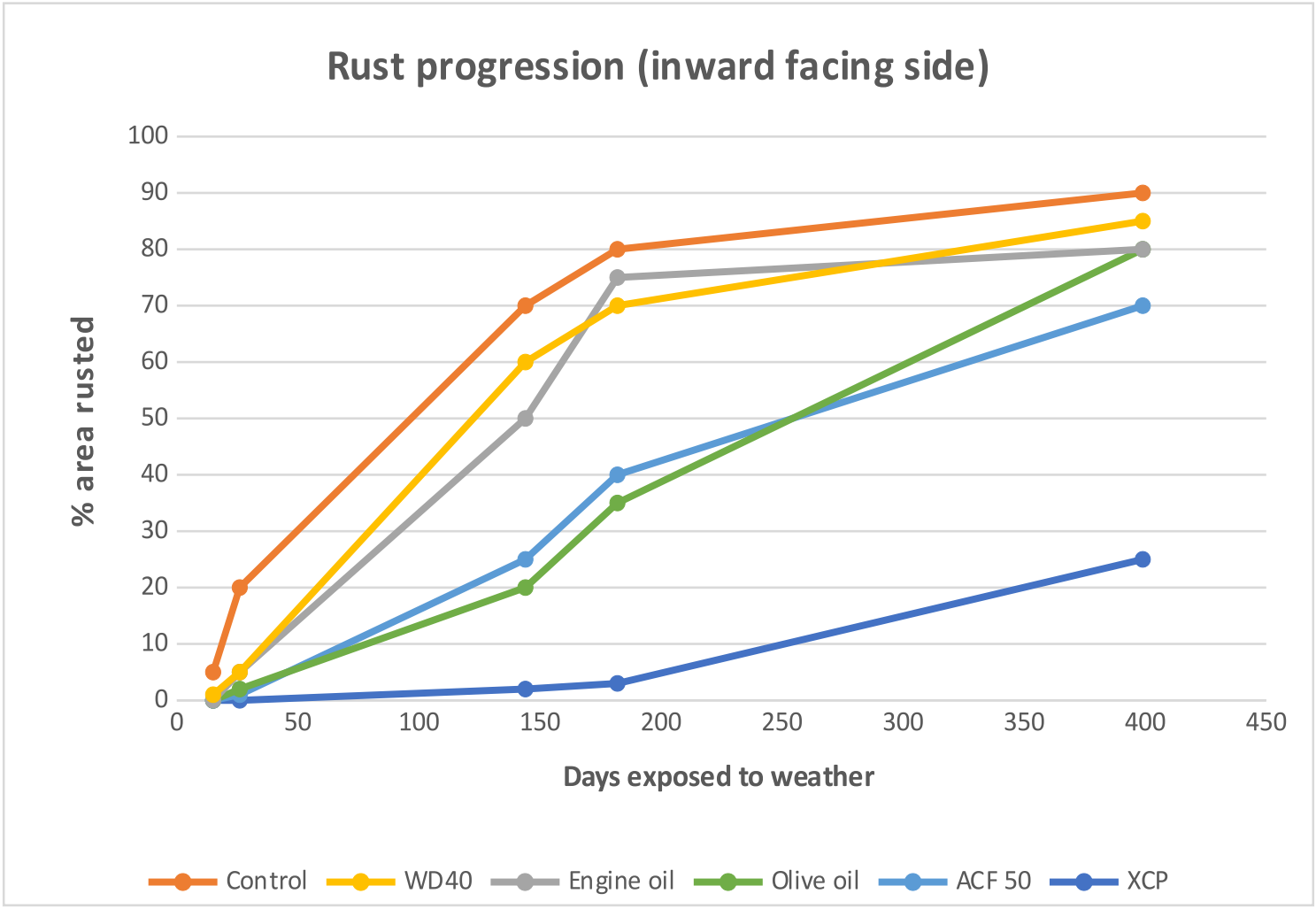
Short-lived protectants. WD40 and engine oil gave only short-term (max few weeks) protection against rust. In the medium to long term the corrosion in these sections not fare much better than the bare control. This is what I expected for WD40 but was surprised that engine oil I chose was not more effective.

Medium term protectants. The specialist product ACF 50 and Olive oil gave useful protection against rust for several months but eventually after a year the protection eroded and the % cover of rust approached that of the control. Olive oil performed much better in this regard than I had expected.

Most Durable protectant. In a class of its own was the rust protectant XCP only showing any significant signs of rust after a year. As with similar experimental reviews in the motorcycle world XCF clearly out performs ACF 50.

Conclusion

The practical conclusions I draw from this are to keep using WD40 for day-to-day protection as I have done this for years; I know it works and leaves minimal residues. For medium to longer term protection, Olive oil (I now have a spray applicator to make this more convenient to use). Whilst the fancy motorcycle products potentially perform better, they are more expensive, and I will not be storing my blades outdoors or riding them on salty roads! Now I have purchased a can of XCF I may use it to treat some of my unused display blades so I don't need to worry about them as much.
Postscript 2024. I am re running this trial to incorporate four other rust protection products recommended to me by scythers on Facebook..



Rust Removal

In David Tresemer's Scythe Book he describes a tradition where mowers hung their scythes in a tree for the winter to rust the iron out, thus—according to the tradition—raising the percent of carbon, and the hardness of the blade.

I have always thought this sounds like an excuse for having neglected a blade. It may have been a thing done on occasion, but little evidence of a benefit to steel composition.



There are inevitably occasions where rust forms and it needs removing to restore the blade. This ranges from light surface rust blooms when blades are left and not cleaned and oiled in a timely manner, to heavily corroded vintage blades with decades of accumulated rust.

Superficial rust removal

Blades with superficial surface rust are easily cleaned using abrasive decorating sponges, garryflex cleaning blocks and elbow grease.

Even a blade that has been neglected at the end of the season and left over winter in a shed can easily be restored this way.

The longer a blade has been left the more work is required to clean it back. Blades which have rusted will retain marking and tarnish in places where the rust was and will only come back to being silver shiny after a number of cleaning sessions over time.

Blade Patina

I have seen some blades which have not been cleaned to a high standard but given a quick wipe down to remove soil and salts and then and stored well in dry conditions. These blades do not appear to rust and corrode heavily but instead accumulate a layer of congealed plant sap mixed with rust, some of which is black ferrous Iron (II) oxide (magnetite) and some brown rust.

This layer is often dark brown/black in colour and quite strongly adhered to the blade (hard to clean off). It is quite possible that this patina of magnetite and plant sap (reducing sugars) makes a protective coating reducing corrosion rates. This is most likely if the blade is oiled as the coating can absorb and hold the oil which stops the layer being a moisture trap.



Heavy rust removal

Internet remedies for rust include using vinegar or molasses to facilitate lifting and cleaning off rust, as well as proprietary rust removers and the process of electrolysis.

My standard method in the past has been to remove as much rust as I can mechanically with wire brush attachment on a disc cutter, plus a sanding flap wheels on a slower speed electric drill. The remaining adhered rust (there is always some especially in pitted surfaces) I treat with a proprietary phosphoric acid based product like Jenolite or Kurust which convert the rust to FESo4 which forms a protective layer that can be overpainted or oiled. This is a quick and easy method and works well for me.

Looking for a better result for restoring vintage blades I decided to try electrolysis for the first time. I chose a number of heavily corroded vintage English blades, plus the blade from my one-year rust protectant test. The method can be seen in progress on my video. https://youtu.be/mtCSfV6ZTec



Four vintage English blades:
two crown blades & two riveted. Two rusty before treatment and two after electrolysis



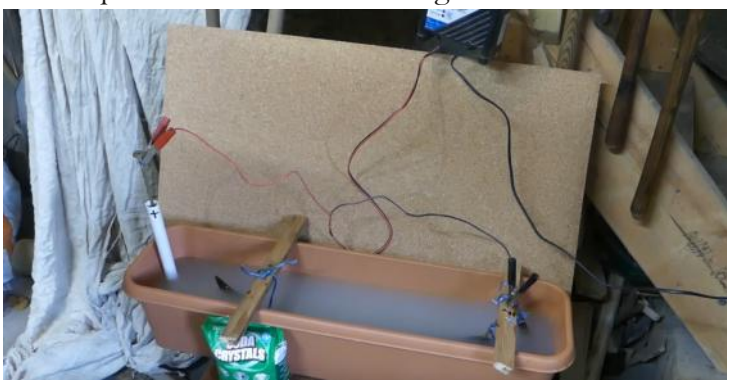
I was pretty impressed with the results. Electrolysis is particularly good at clearing crevices and details like maker's stamps.

Once the electrolysis bath had been set up the process was pretty effortless: just connect up, leave it fizzing for a day or two, remove, clean up and add surface protectant.

Method

Equipment

Battery charger – 12v regular car battery charger
Long blade-length trough – plastic patio planter (without holes) from garden centre (20 litre capacity)
Washing soda – Sodium carbonate – 'Soda Crystals' widely available in supermarkets (3g/l = 60g per fill).
Soda salts act as electrolyte (do not over-dose as solution would be too conductive and draw too much current).
Scrap steel as a sacrificial anode (+ve anode). I used a length of angle steel shaped to go around three sides of the base of the trough to surround the rusty blades from all sides giving a clear "line-of-sight" between all parts of the blade (-ve cathode) and the anode.
Long metal screws or nails to connect down the scrap and to the blade in the solution, with part left sticking out for connection of the charger terminals. I sleeved the +ve screw connection with a plastic tube to prevent an accidental short circuit contact with the -ve blade.
Twine and wood to make non-conductive supports to hang the blades from. This set up was both easy and cheap to set up. As I already had a battery charger, the most expensive item was the trough.



Electrolysis

I generally ran the electrolysis from 24 – 48 hours depending on the level of corrosion.
It did no seem to make a difference whether I wire brushed the worst of the rust beforehand or not (other than to the quantity of rust sediment left in the trough afterwards). I cleared out the trough, brush cleaned the anode and refreshed the electrolyte solution after every two blades processed.

Post-electrolysis

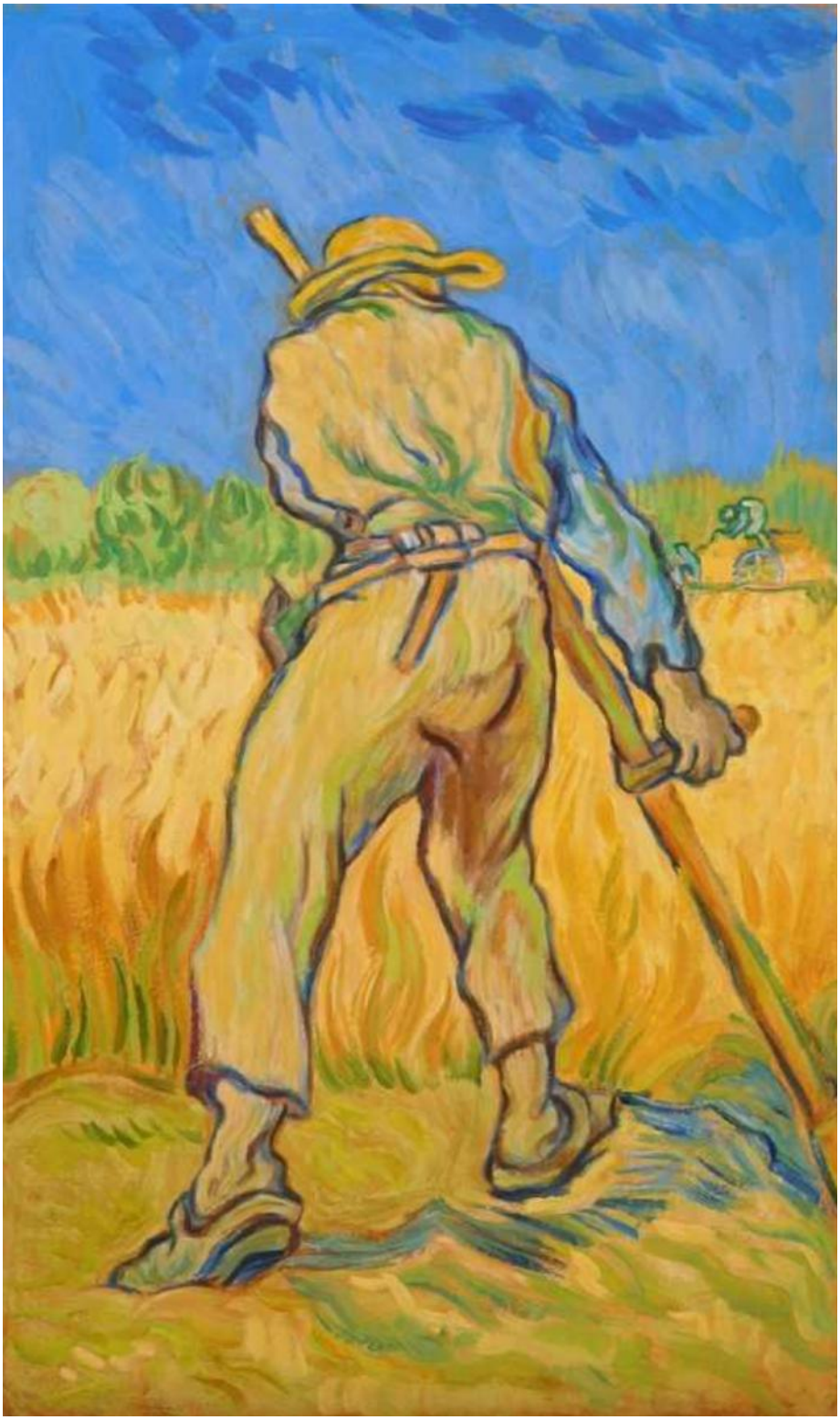
After 24–48 hours I removed the blades from the bath.
At this point the red rust had all fallen away but a layer of black magnetite remained clinging to the blade. This I cleaned back with scourers and wire brush.
The freshly exposed metal starts to rust instantly once in contact with the air. To cure this and seal the surface I immediately applied a thin coat of Jenolite followed by wax or oil (the previous treatment and any adhered ferric oxide acting as a key to hold the oil).
Rust is hydrated ferric iron (III) oxide formed from the oxidation reaction of iron with oxygen and water. This familiar red brown oxide progressively replaces strong metallic iron structures with a brittle porous crystalline accumulation that is weakly attached to the iron and so crumbles away.
In reducing conditions with limited oxygen, iron(II) ferrous oxide is formed which is black.
Magnetite is an intermediate mineral oxide containing both ferrous iron(II) and ferric iron (III) oxides. It is brownish black in colour. Magnetite is mechanically more stable on the surface of metal and can provide better corrosion protection than red oxide rust. Steel is sometimes deliberately coated with 'black oxide' to form a protective layer on the surface of iron and steel. On its own black oxide offers only mild corrosion resistance but can be reinforced by impregnation with oil or wax.

Atmospheric corrosion can result in a complex of different oxides developing depending on localised conditions and the balance of oxygen, water salts and acidity. The oxidation/reduction reactions are reversible: red rust can convert to black magnetite and vice versa.
The hydrogen atoms present in water molecules can combine with other elements to form acids, which will eventually cause more metal to be exposed. If chloride ions are present, as is the case with saltwater, the corrosion is likely to occur more quickly and destructively.
Iron or steel structures might appear to be solid, but water molecules can penetrate the microscopic pits and cracks in any exposed metal. As a result, corrosion will not occur uniformly, a smooth surface will become visibly pock marked with pits.
During electrolysis the chemistry and oxidation state of the environment around the object is manipulated by applying DC electrical current. A number of things happen during the process.

- Water moleciules are split by electrolysis with hydrogen gas bubbles produced from the -ve cathode (the blade) and oxygen bubbles from the +ve anode. This can be seen as a gentle fizz.
- Much of red rust (and other grime) becomes dissociated and dislodged by hydrogen bubble formation at the objects metal surface and falls away to the bottom of the trough.
- A significant proportion of the rust is converted (reduced) to black magnetite, most of which also falls to the bottom of the trough as sediment, but a proportion remains as a black coating adhered to the blade.
- Some of the dissociated iron oxide migrates through the solution and is deposited on the sacrificial anode as rusty encrustations.

The system is not powerful enough to convert rust back to metallic iron, and iron is not moved through the cold solution from the sacrificial anode to be electroplated on the cathode (the blade). Metal lost through corrosion is therefore not replaced; the process just strips rust back down to the metallic pitted surface. Sound metal on the object is not negatively affected or etched away during the process (so the process can be left running without fear of overcooking the blade). Freshly exposed bare metal surfaces will rust very quickly once taken out of the [low oxygen] electrolyte solution and exposed wet to the air. Immediate treatment (drying and oiling) is needed to prevent this.

Scything Injuries



‘In Harmony Scythe & Scyther’

This article covers the 'muscular' injuries we inflict upon ourselves through scything & some ways we can help our bodies to prevent or cure these ailments in the future. We also look @ the injuries we inflict upon our scythes, either through lack of upkeep, bad set-up, or just plain bad Scything.

After all; 'A bad Workman always blames his tools'.

In the middle of article there is some encouragement to attend the Scythe Festival (greenscythefair.org.uk) @ Langport, or any other scythe festival in June, July & August. This is is highly recommended for good & not so good reasons. One can always learn from fellow Scythers, especially as they are trying to get better each year too. It's an amazing day out for all the family.

OK, not really injuries but manage or preventing injuries. I am 70 years old, I thoroughly enjoy scything. I have a wonderful physiotherapist Cheryl, who is amazing at dealing with my body failings: sore ankles, bad back, both shoulders sore or in agony, knees too!. What I'm trying to lead scythers too are exercises to strengthen those weak parts of our bodies and maintain this. I'm not perfect myself and when I stop the aches & pains come back with a vengeance.

The fun part of scything is that I really enjoy the adjusting of the scythe that we need to do for different situations or grass types or just how we are feeling that day.

When we have been scything a while we try to stretch ourselves beyond our comfort zone perhaps going for speed or extra width or both and we start pulling muscles in strange places.

Latex for strengthening exercises.



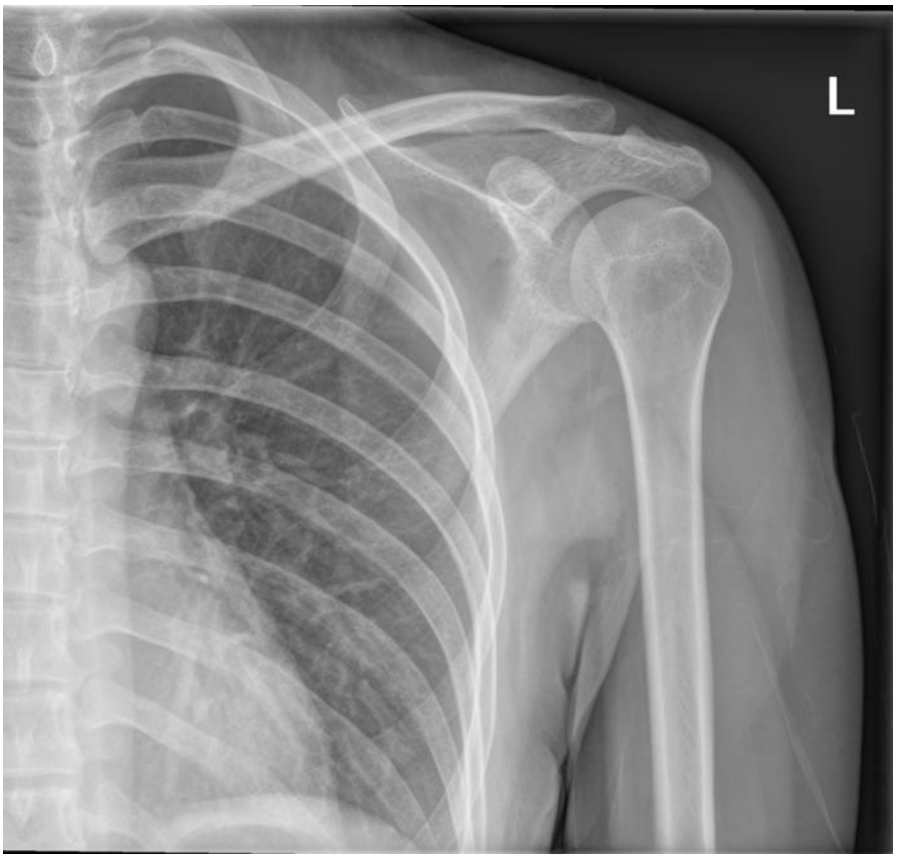
Holding one hand still & moving other hand out slowly and controlled



A little tension , just lifting arms up, very slowly

So now I have to travel with my piece of latex in my pocket, so one can do these stretches/exercises many times during the day.

So yes when my shoulder was at war with me the physiotherapist sent me for an xray, thankfully no arthritis, so she could help me to help myself.



A normal shoulder x-ray, but those muscles need to be strong & Scything will show up any weaknesses.



A bit of pressure of elbow into wall, hold for 10seconds (or tree trunk while walking)



Back on hand, pressure onto wall & hold for 10seconds (or tree trunk while walking)

Other techniques for building up strength are pilates https://plus.britishrowing.org/2020/04/07/pilates-1-core-strength/) & plyometric exercises. The beauty of these although you can enrol in the gym you can do them on your own.

When one is teaching beginners one can see how some people are very well balanced and some are not so balanced.
To even this up a bit I have them doing so small amounts of Tai Chi without the scythe, so as to begin the process of being balanced and swapping between Tai Chi/scything. So we can achieve a balanced swing of scything with ease.

And yes a new scyther will wake up the following morning after their first days scything with a few aches & pains. They have used new muscles after all, & their normal stretching beyond their norm, & because they are so excited that they have learned a new craft out they go next morning & continue with just as much joy & vigour. It is going to take a little while to build up strength in those new muscles.

Scythe Injuries(or Injuries to the Scythe) are very much preventable. It starts with good teaching & why it's not such a good idea to teach yourself to Scythe. We need to be disciplined in how we look after our scythe while using it. We all know we need to hone regularly & well! & when we have honed (or better before) we need to check that the hafting angle is ok.

Testing for Sharpness

Fingers on top of Rib/blade with thumb testing for sharpness



This is done with fingers on top of rib with the thumb tweaking at the sharp edge to see how much it grips. This needs to be checked all the way along the blade.

Scythe Injuries that are most common are:

Bent Clamp
Loose clamp screws
Lost Nuts (Barrel nut in lower grip)
Lost Wedge



Handles Wobble
Keep in pocket at all times



Try all wedges



Parrysfield Hafting Angle Ready Reckoner

Now these are all preventable from good teaching. Simply when we hone our blades every 2 to 3 to 5 minutes we need to check the hafting angle/setting is ok, simply checking that it is tight and not moving. This is similar to above photo, gripping the the rib with our fingers & seeing if it will move. If the blade moves at all our hafting angle is compromised and we need to set it up again using the ready-reckoner.

Having watched people struggle with the standard set-up for a 65cm blade; The 'Scythe Book' says 30mm hafting angle, but this can be a struggle, so try 40 or 50mm. A scan of good women scythers; the one's who make it look like the grass cuts itself. This can be seen at the Scythe Fair in the Women's Synchronized Scything event where 4-6 women join together to Scythe, as a demonstration of team mowing. This for me is the highlight of the Scythe

Fair, as these women do not look like they are trying or using any great physical strength. Just a great set-up of their Scythe, with perfect timing; and yes try to use one of their scythes, test the sharpness before starting. I guarantee you will feel that the blade slices more easily than you've felt before.
Of course the blade will be very sharp.



Sadly, one is definitely not a woman and is not as balanced either, Sorry Simon. Photo by Scythe Association

In Summary: We set-up the Scythe with the 3 best angles: Lift, Lay, & Hafting Angle. We should always be up for adjusting these to suit the grass conditions and how we are Scything on the day. These, checked regularly will help drastically to prevent us injuring ourselves and the Scythe too and obtain the best swoooosh you ever had!

David Kuegler, Parrysfield https://www.instagram.com/parrysfieldorcop/ david.kuegler@btinternet.com

RIPPLES

By

Colin Close

I'm sure that those of an artistic bent consider ripples to one of natures natural beauties. The ripple's in a stream, those that form so mysteriously on beach when the tide recedes or the graceful transient ones when the wind blows across a field of ripe grain.

Should this phenomenon form whilst a scyther is peening their blade it's considered rather more as a thing of horror rather that of beauty.

To those new to peening it can seem a ripple is a major disaster and perhaps the ruination of their blade that they so lovingly cared for. I would imagine there are very few scythers who when peening have not brought one into existence and have wondered how and why it happened.
Many may have realised that when the ripple formed when they had decided that the peening was going to slowly and discovered (to their chagrin!) that wielding the hammer with extra vigour did not produce the result required; slightly more subtle but no less disastrous is moving the blade forward a bit extra and then realising that a small area has not been peened and going back to try and peen it again.

So what is the mechanism behind the formation of the ripples? To understand this fully requires a knowledge of the material from which the scythe is made. Scythes are usually manufactured from a low to medium carbon steel what this means is that pure iron plus other trace metals is mixed with with carbon; the amount of Carbon typically being in the range of <0.25-0.6%. This alloy results in a steel that is tough and springy with moderate hardness ideal properties for a scythe blade. Steel is a ductile material which means that it can be deformed without fracture.
Why does this matter? Consider a sheet of glass lying on a wooden block. If you hit it with a hammer what happens? It shatters or cracks, this is because the energy that you put into the glass by striking it has to go somewhere; in the case of the glass part of the energy is absorbed by the glass directly under the hammer head and thence to the wooden block the rest is dissipated through the remainder of the sheet and causes it to shatter. This is because glass is not ductile and cannot absorb the stress. Perform the same experiment on a sheet of steel and you will maybe see a small dent or perhaps not even that. So where has the energy from the hammer gone? Well as with the glass much of it will have been transferred to the supporting structure (an anvil maybe) but some of it has been stored in the steel in the form of stress. All around the point where the hammer struck will be a circle of stress where the steel is being held in compression because it has been slightly deformed (because it is ductile). This is exactly what happens when a scythe blade edge is struck with a hammer or indirectly with a peening jig but with one important difference in that the steel is not of a uniform thickness. The closer to the edge of the blade the thinner the materiel becomes. Now imagine if you will a single hammer (or jig) strike close to the edge of the blade; the circle of stress will no longer be circular because one side of the steel is unsupported (because we are at the edge) and not only that but the steel is also becoming progressively thinner toward that edge. Due to this the circle of stress comes more to resemble the shape of a bracket fungi (The half moon shaped fungi that grow from the side of trees). So how is the stress energy stored in the steel. An inherent property of many materials is elasticity so even though it doesn't look like it the piece of steel your blade is made from is really a just a big spring! However this wonderful property which incidently allows the construction very lightweight but stiff scythe blades has a downside (though perhaps not in the case of scythes) that is if you try and store too much energy in the steel instead of storing it overcomes the steels elasticity and the steel starts to stretch or in engineering terms it reaches the the yield point. In the case of our scythe edge this is what we want of course because if the steel is stretched it means it's getting thinner thus forming our peened edge. Now this all seems fine and it's what we want to happen except that sometimes it doesn't….. why? Because there are further mechanisms at work we need to take into account. The first is the detail of what happens with the hammer strike; when the hammer hits the blade and anvil combination hard enough to stretch the steel it is the area of maximum stress that is deformed assuming that the stress applied is greater that the yield point. Remember we said that the circle of stress forms an arc outward from the body of the blade, the implication of this is that where the edge

where the hammer struck is not only stretching out from the edge but also your piece of steel is trying to get longer as well as wider! The curved shape of the edge and the construction of the blade are so strong that this increase in length is almost completely restrained and so the extra "length" is stored as stress along the edge and in the body of the blade.
The shape of this compressive stress forms an elliptical arc with the maximum stress being at the points where the arc crosses the edge. There is a another material property that further complicates the situation and that is work (or strain to use the proper term) hardening. It's common knowledge in the scything community that peening a blade increases it's hardness by a small amount what is perhaps less well known is that this extra hardness comes at a cost; When a material is work hardened it gains in its tensile strength (ability to resist stretching) but at the cost in the corresponding loss of compressive strength (resistance to squashing) as will be seen this effect can also contribute to creation of ripples. So lets put all these things together and create some ripples!

Ripple No1: The Big Bash Ripple
This is the easy one it happens simply because the hammer is stretching the steel too much the steel becomes so thin that it can no longer transmit the residual compressive stress caused by the increase in length to the rest of the blade because (a) the hardening and (b) the thinning of the steel reduces it compressive strength so much that it buckles to take up the extra length and a ripple forms.

Ripple No2: The "I've missed a bit ripple"
This ripple is more subtle; sometimes when I peen a blade and inspect it I find a section that wasn't peened to my satisfaction so I go over it again and I get a ripple. I'm not sure I fully understand how these ripples form. To gain some insight into the mechanics of the hammer, scythe, anvil interactions I have performed some computer stress simulations. The results of which seem to indicate that there are additional areas of peak stress created by the hammer strike. As discussed above the shape of the stress pattern is similar to a the shape of a bracket fungi. Additional areas of peak stress occur at a distance from the point of impact. These areas could be viewed as pre-tensioned springs. Normally one peens a blade from end to end and so the areas of extra stress never overlap each other however when one returns to an area already peened there is a good chance that the stress points created by hammer blows in an area already peened could coincide with those already created increasing the stress to the point where the edge ripples. It must be said though that in my personal experience quite often the areas I go back too are spots where some light damage has occurred and the edge needed pulling out a bit more to keep the sweep of the edge smooth and thus the ripples may have been caused by overpeening as described below.

Ripple No3: Overpeening (A new word?)
With each strike of your hammer the edge of the scythe is trying to get longer and longer as you work along the blade you can create a situation if you overpeen; where the peened edge becomes drawn out too far from the body of the scythe such that the change in length cannot be constrained in the curvature of the scythe so the excess steel has to go somewhere. As the steel of a peened edge becomes thinner the loss of compressive strength due to the hardening effect plus the reduction in thickness create a situation where the edge insufficiently rigid to store the additional stress and the steel being still quite ductile folds into a ripple to shorten the length of of the edge and remove the stress. The curve of the edge of a scythe varies continuously in radius over it's length so overpeening ripples tend to occur in the areas of tightest curvature (smallest radius).

Ripple No4: Blade Repair
When a blade is damaged by a stone or hard object it is not uncommon to peen metal from either side of the damage in order to pull out the dent in the edge. This process has a high ripple potential as you are concentrating stress into one particular area of the edge. If it is too thin it will ripple.

Are ripples a problem?
It depends, one thing you don't want to do is to try and hammer them flat you will not succeed and will most likely make them worse you may even fold them over and cause a crack which has the potential to spread. The best course of action is to leave them be if they are not too large; as you hone the blade they will gradually wear away and they seem to have little effect on the functioning of the scythe.If however the ripple is large and if it's near the beard things can get difficult; blades tend to be less rigid in this area and more easily deformed; overpeening here can result in a broad 'U' shape which dips down below the rest of the edge causing scalping of the grass at the beard section of the swathe. I have yet to find a way of adequately dealing with this so the best thing is to be

vigilant when peening this part of the blade. Blades with wide beards are particularly vulnerable to this. Ripples can also be caused by poor aiming of the hammer an can be more prevalent if you are using one of the square Picard hammers; should the corner of one of these hammers strike the blade the pointed edge will exert extra force that does not occur when hitting with the face of the hammer: This can cause a ripple especially when doing a final edge peen. It is best to round off the corners of these hammers to minimise the issues caused by a poorly aimed blow.

It is possible to remove a ripple? At least in theory I have never managed it except by accident when experimenting with one of my peening machines but I have seen the before and after of someone who has done it by hand and I know it can be done. In principle it should be possible to stretch the metal behind the ripple thus forcing the ripple to a larger radius thus stretching it out until it flattens, much in the same way as you would repair blade edge except that you don't work from either side but from the centre. —

Stress plot anvil along edge

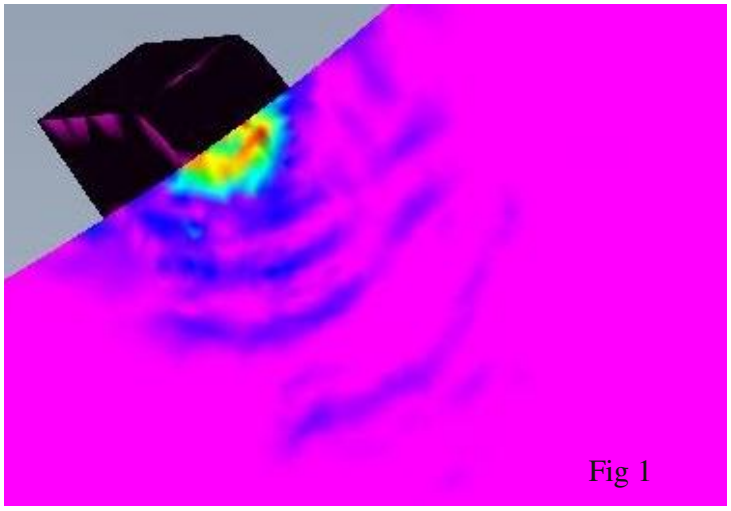


Fig 1

Stress plot anvil angled to edge

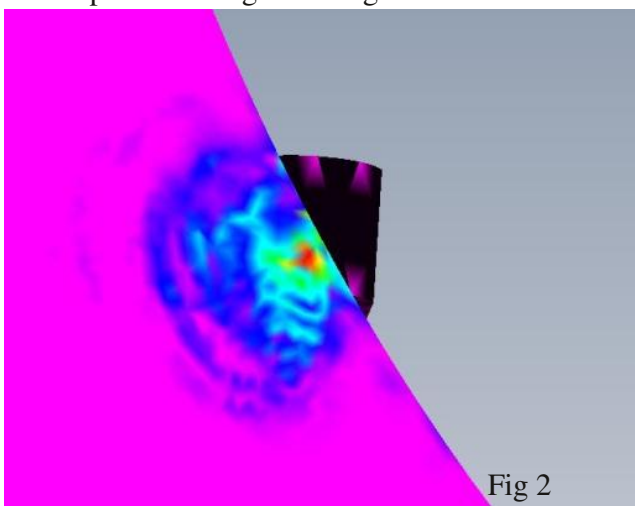


Fig 2

Here are a few pictures of the results of some simulations ; they are not definitive but do give an idea of how the blades steel changes during peening.

Two different presentaions of the anvil are used to illustrate how changing this can have significant affect on the way the material deforms. Figure 3 shows definate nodes where there is potential for a ripple. This is far less evident in Figure 4 which shows that the effect of the hammer blow is more local in terms of both stress and deformation. To give some sort of scale top the plots; red is high stress/deformation ; dark blue is low stress; pink is zero.
There are other variables that have not been fully investigated such as the effect that the radius of the face of the hammer for example. These plots were generated using a hammer with face radius of mm. The energy in the hammer blow was 3.5 Joules. For those of you have SDS hammers peening equipment this equates to around an 800 Watt model.
The dynamic aspect of the hammer/scythe/anvil interaction is complex as there are permanent changes to the properties of the steel during and after the hammer blow. The simulations show what happens with a single blow of the hammer and is very much an oversimplification. Just to give some idea of how things change after a single hit; the metal that has gone beyond the elastic limit of the steel then it requires a greater amount of force than before to stretch it. Worth bearing in mind when peening. This is by no means an exhaustive study I have not attempted to simulate the post type jig which will almost certainly behave differently than the hammer and curved anvil I have simulated. In summary though it must be said that there is just no substitute for practice when it comes to peening a scythe with hammer and anvil!!

Deformation plot anvil along edge

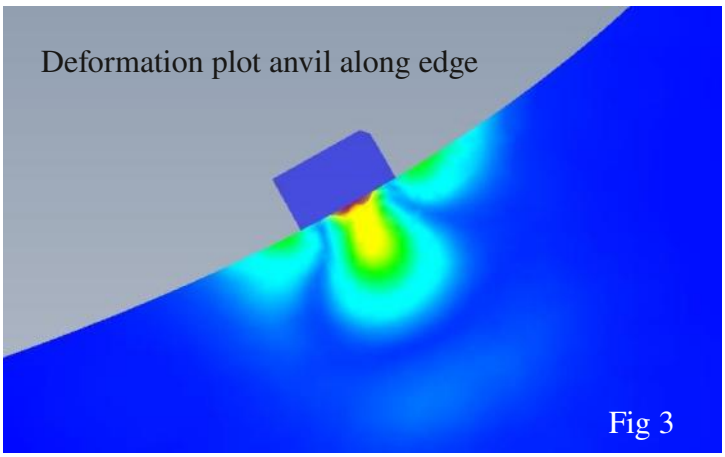


Fig 3

Deformation plot anvil angled to edge

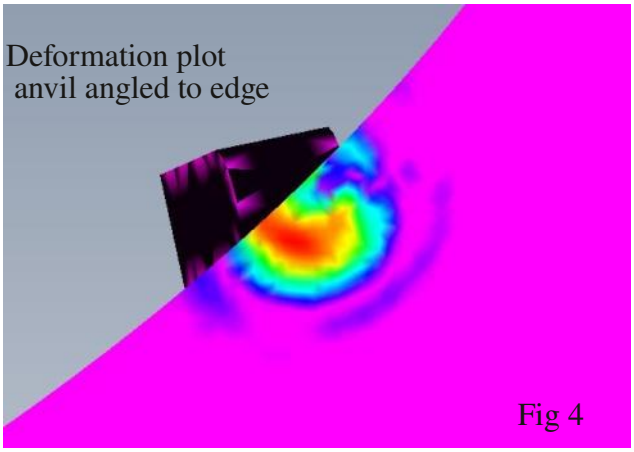


Fig 4

The Farmoor Scythe and the Floodplain Factor

By

Nicole Clough

As a freelance scythe teacher, I feel fortunate every day for meeting such remarkable and inspiring people on my courses. One course in particular in 2023 held a special surprise for me.

The flow of the day led me talk more than usual about the history of the scythe and, given our location in my home county of Oxfordshire, I felt it pertinent to mention that an astonishingly intact Roman scythe blade had been found not far away, on an archaeological dig at Farmoor. In response to this, one of the attendees, with a tone of complete modesty, said 'I found that'!…

As you may imagine, I was starstruck. Whilst they revived me with a cup of tea, the chap in question revealed more. He was no less than the highly respected George Lambrick, Honorary Vice President and former Director of the Council for British Archeology, and finder of the renowned Farmoor scythe in the 1970s. He recalled how, towards the end of the dig (occasioned by a massive reservoir extension), he had spotted an enticing fragment of metal within the wall of the trench which, on further exploration, slowly and excitingly revealed itself to be a scythe blade. It was broken and bent, previously repaired but missing its tip, and when intact would have originally measured a whopping 1.3 - 1.4 metres in length. It dated from the late Roman period, circa 300 - 410 AD.



Over the following weeks, George kindly shared with me reports relating to the Farmoor scythe and studies of soil deposits, such as the remains of seeds and insects. These come together to mark the changes in the landscape over time and our ancestors' responses to them.

At the time of the Farmoor blade discovery, around 50 other blades had been found at 30 different sites. Most were not full blades but sections. Some of these were found together, possibly indicating a production or storage site. The Farmoor blade is particularly exciting, not only due to its condition, but because it was found beside a floodplain meadow, at the end of a track passing through a series of paddocks or small fields, raising questions about its usage. Archaeo-botanical and soil studies revealed evidence of the floodplain being used for pasture, but also discovered was a waterlogged pit in one of the paddocks containing a dump of rotten hay.

We are often asked 'when did people start scything?' Certainly the Romans were scything, as proven not just by archaeological finds but by historical texts. An Iron Age scythe blade was discovered about 20 years ago during construction of the Eton Rowing Lake. On the continent, examples of bronze age tools have been discovered which resemble a scythe. However, finds of indisputable ancient scythe blades are rare. We may have had the materials and the skills to make scythes but metal, a valued resource, would have been melted down and reworked if an item was broken or not needed. It is mainly thanks to exceptional circumstances (such as ritual deposition or accidental abandonment) that some items have survived to provide us with clues. So, to explore the beginnings of scything, it is helpful to look at when we began to have the need to scythe.

To do this, it is beneficial to look back to the end of the Last Glacial Period, and the Farmoor dig and associated studies help us piece together the story. With the recession of the ice, the climate circa 9000 BC had become suitable for early pioneer tree species, such as willow and birch. Woodlands developed over time, to include oak and elm, and by 4000 BC there is evidence of trees being cut and used by humans. The Bronze Age landscape of 2500 - 800 BC then features open grassland areas with light grazing, and there is evidence of animal husbandry and foggage systems (areas being shut off for winter grazing).

Within this period, c.1400 BC, comes evidence that the floodplain water table is rising. By the mid Iron Age, 350 - 1 BC, this had developed into seasonal flooding, indicated by shifts in the suite of plant species and the presence of aquatic molluscs. It is after this impactful landscape change that the earliest evidence of hay is dated to, c.200 AD, at Farmoor and elsewhere besides. Cue the Farmoor scythe, dating from the century

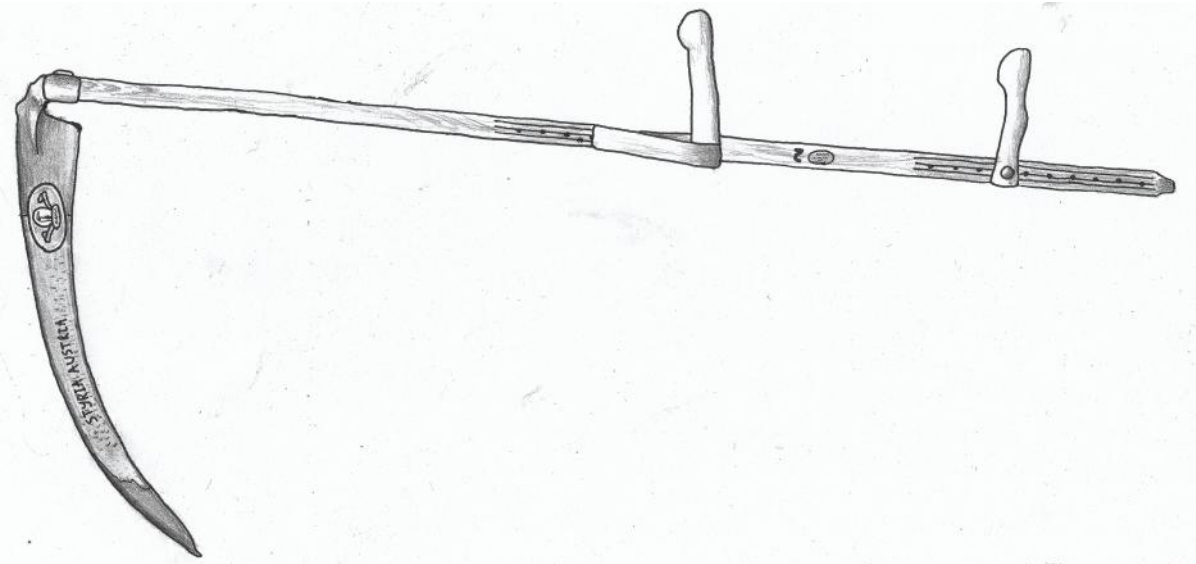
which followed.
Arguably, in my part of the world, it was not just seasonal flooding which encouraged people to cut and store vegetation for feeding their animals in leaner times. The arrival of the Romans would likely have been a considerable factor, not only in terms of their influence, but due to the consequent increase in population. Across much of Britain, including Oxfordshire, there were Roman towns and standing armies: all in all, there were many more mouths to feed (both human and non-human!). After the end of the Roman rule such pressure eased, only to revive by the late Saxon period, when floodplain hay meadows were becoming an established and highly valued part of the landscape. Despite the Black Death easing pressure, medieval manuscripts demonstrate an ongoing need for scythes to cut both grass and crops. Flooding and floodplain meadows remained part of the rural landscape, with their bucolic, wildflower-rich scenes still firmly held within our cultural perception of beauty. It is also such biodiverse meadows which we are striving to protect today, after a devastating 90% loss within the last 100 years.

And so the search continues regarding the origins of scything, as well it should, with new discoveries and questions that arise. The technology to make scythes existed before we have evidence of them, so other factors must have played a part in how their use developed. Perhaps we can deduce, generally, that the need for scything will have varied between regions, climate and topographies? That growing populations and decreased availability of grazing land play a major role? That the scythe comes into its own for haymaking? That it had been waiting in the wings, in other shapes and forms, with other tasks assigned to it such as wheat harvesting? Until it became its 'heyday'…

Thankfully we all know that its heyday is not over. So many of us are now seeking greener, cleaner solutions, to be sensitive to wildlife, listen to the birdsong whilst we work, talk to our companions, breathe fresh air, exercise gently, carry less kit, spend less money…It is no wonder that we are once again picking up our scythes. The scythe is very much a tool for our times.

Article written by Nicole Clough
www.joyofscything.uk

With my gratitude to George Lambrick





Ancient wisdom

SERENADE OF THE SCYTHE

Anna-Maria Bauer celebrates the revival of the time-honoured tradition of English grass cutting in Dorset and beyond.



With a determined expression on her face, Caroline Morgan-Grenville tightens her grip on the two handled scythe, takes a deep breath and swings the tool just as she was instructed to do. But as she takes her first sweep, the blade's tip makes its first dip into the soil.

As it turns out, scything isn't as easy as it looks. Caroline, a painter from West Sussex, takes solace from the fact that she is not alone in her struggle to get the swooshing movement just right. Among the dozen people around her on this workshop at Monkton Wyld Court in Bridport, similar moments of frustration are experienced as we attempt to slice through the tall grass.

Standing at the edge of the lawn keeping watch, scything expert Simon Fairlie offers guidance, reminding us to keep our feet shoulder-width apart with our knees bent – as if we were skiing, or at least how he imagines skiing to be, admitting his lack of experience of the sport. However, it's a fitting analogy as the tool we are using on this workshop originates from the alpine regions of Austria – and is a rather lighter, nimbler and more adaptable tool than traditional English scythes.

"A resurgence of the scything tradition has emerged, driven by a renewed focus on sustainability and the recognition of meadows as vital wildlife habitats"

The scything revival

While scythes were once extensively employed for grass and shrub cutting across Europe and North America, their use significantly declined in the 20th century, particularly on the large, intensive farms of the UK. The rise of mechanical alternatives and the pursuit of greater efficiency led to the closure of many scythe-producing factories, corresponding with a decline in formerly wildflower-rich meadows.

However, in recent years, a resurgence of the scything tradition has emerged, driven by a renewed focus on sustainability, the recognition of meadows as vital wildlife habitats, and the urgent need to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels. Scything offers a way to manage grasslands and meadows more sensitively and selectively, enabling biodiversity to thrive. The scything scenes in BBC One's popular *Poldark* series also did much to bring the technique back into the public eye, particularly the shirtless shots of the show's heartthrob lead actor, Aiden Turner.

But Turner can't take all the credit. Leading the revival in the UK is Simon himself, who has dedicated himself to bringing back this ancient art. He was in his forties when he had a transformative encounter with a European scythe. He immediately felt the difference: not only lighter in weight, it was also more flexible and more adaptable than the English scythes he had previously used. At that time, Simon was working in Somerset on the small, off-grid woodland





The tools of the trade – lightweight Austrian scythes

community called 'Tinker's Bubble', which adhered to a strict no fossil-fuel policy. After discovering the Austrian producer Schröckenfux, Simon became the first to import their scythes into the UK. Then in 2005, Simon encountered the Canadian scything revolutionist Peter Vido, who shared his scything skills with Simon.

Today, Simon believes that 'scything by hand through summer growth is usually quicker than using a strimmer. Once you have learnt how to sharpen and use the scythe properly, mowing by hand becomes a joy, rather than a struggle. And best of all there is no disruptive noise, no disturbing vibration and no damaging pollution.'

Letting meadows grow

It was the environmental aspect of scything that attracted Caroline and her husband Roger to the workshop. As a dedicated conservationist, Roger has written several non-fiction books on the struggles of birds, cows and bees. Naturally, the couple's interests extended to exploring eco-friendly gardening methods on their own land.

'We took No Mow May so seriously last year that it lasted until August,' shares Caroline during the afternoon tea break, referring to the annual campaign, which asks the owners of Britain's 23 million gardens to let their lawns and meadows grow wild throughout May. The immaculate bright green bowling green lawn with its neat stripes may have historically been the desired garden aesthetic, but according to Plantlife CEO Ian Dunn, those days should be over. With one in five wildflowers under threat, as a majority of flower rich meadows have been lost in the UK since the 1970s, taking a different approach to lawn management is more important than ever.

But when the long grass finally needs a cut, how can it be done in the most environmentally sensitive way?

'We were worried about the impact on insect life when using a strimmer,' Caroline says. So they took the ancient scythe out of the shed that had been there since they moved in. However, it quickly became apparent that scything needs guidance and practise to master.

The soothing swoosh

Other workshop participants share similar stories. Ian Hutchcroft from South Devon looks after a half-acre orchard and is hoping to find a way to manage the grass between the apple and pear trees, without relying on heavy machinery. Allen Shaw from Exminster, near Exeter, supports a



Scything students: Caroline and Roger Morgan-Grenville

farmer who cultivates a seven-acre, fully organic farm. While Ted Litchfield serves as a trustee for the charity Growth for Life, which offers therapeutic gardening and maybe, in the future, scything workshops.

While many attendees at this workshop are approaching retirement age, which is typical for scything beginners, Simon says there is a growing interest from younger generations. Lydia Popham, 28, who recently moved here from Australia, is volunteering at a farm where scything is used, and thought it might be a useful skill to learn.

'I'd love to find a job in foresting, somewhere rural,' she says. By early afternoon, her sweeps are already looking light and natural; producing the satisfying 'swoosh' sound of a successful slice.

'I absolutely love it,' she says, her face reflecting a blissful expression. The calming, rhythmic repetition of scything. once mastered, reminds me of Tolstoy's description of scything in Anna Karenina, when Levin recalls a state of unconsciousness as the scythe seems to mow on its own: a living entity with its own consciousness, effortlessly producing perfectly executed work.

Former air traffic controller Stewart Brighton jokingly remarks that if he were certified as a professional scyther, he might fancy becoming a religious figure, playfully referring to himself as a 'soul harvester'. It's a reference to the Grim Reaper that Simon says is a regular joke on his workshops. But after training around 800 people, Simon says some participants have even more unusual reasons for wanting to learn how to scythe. 'London Zoo wanted an alternative to their strimmer because their anteater would go mad whenever the machine approached his enclosure.'



Gill Baron on the scything course at Monkton Wyld Court



Along with Peter Vido, Simon initiated the Green Scythe Fair in Somerset, which still attracts up to 5,000 visitors every year. The emergence of new scything associations such as Scythe Cymru and Wild Scythe fills him with hope that the movement will continue, even when he eventually stops teaching.

'I do feel it is time to slow down,' admits Simon, now aged 72, although he already has plans for the upcoming Beginners' Workshop in the autumn. Demand for last year's course was so high, they added a second course to the calendar for the following week.

As the sun sets on the Neo-Gothic rectory of Monkton Wyld Court, the workshop attendees gather in the dining room for dinner. 'Did you hear it?' Ted asks. 'The silence. Just the swoosh of the blade and the sound of birds. No one talked. And yet, I still felt like it was a communal exercise.'

The group nods in agreement, but I can see that Caroline is not fully engaged with the conversation. Her mind is already transported back to her own meadow, picturing the rhythmic motions, the swaying grass and the satisfying slices ahead.

For details of scything and other courses go to *monktonwyldcourt.co.uk*