

Hoeing Matches



Hoeing Match

Farming methods were transformed in the last century with one example being labour-intensive practice of sowing turnip seed thickly on top of drills by a tractor drawn drill machine. Squads of men and boys would later descend on fields during the summer for the “huowin” (hoeing) or thinning out of excess plants, leading to seed being wasted.

Good-natured banter went between the men as to which was the better drill, which led to minor competitions between each other. This soon spread to challenges among neighbouring farms, until eventually official hoeing matches were organised which took in wider areas.

Rules were laid down and prominent farmers were appointed as judges. The main criteria was exact spacing between each singled neep, all weeds removed, and a perfectly rounded furrow for whole length of the drill. No neeps to be replaced if removed in error. A completion time was given at start of the match which meant latecomers had to work faster, usually reflected in finish of the drill.



Hoeing Competitors



Alexander (Sandy) Wood Mearns, Champion Hoer

The right-hand cabinet contains some of the many trophies and medals won by Alexander (Sandy) Wood Mearns (1907-1997), a champion hoer in 1920s and 1930s. Sandy grew up in Old Rayne and worked on various local farms where he was encouraged to use his skills in hoeing competitions. Competitors were allowed 2 hours to hoe 2 drills each 100 yards long. In the cabinet you can see the hoe used by Sandy.

With advanced farming methods, the growing of turnips decreased and the competitions gradually died out never to return. Nowadays seed is planted individually, which removes the thinning requirement.