

Gordano Rotary's Giving Back events give a quarterly opportunity for Gordano Valley-based businesses, charities and community groups to get to know each other, to identify common issues and find solutions!

Kindly hosted by Portishead Pool Community Trust Manager Matthew Sidwell, the latest event was at Café Lido on 29th August. Matthew gave a quick update on progress with the project to bring solar heating to the pool. This was followed by a presentation by Linda Hodgetts, General Secretary of the Portishead and District Horticultural Society. The origins of the Summer Show go back to 1863 when Dr Charles Wigan who lived at Clarence House and owned a large garden formed The Portishead and District Horticultural and Floral Society. The aim of the Show was "to promote Industry in general and horticulture in particular and to conduct competitive exhibitions". The title "and District" reflected the fact that exhibitors included gardeners from Clevedon, Yatton, Stapleton, St Michaels Hill and as far afield as Durdham Down! The Show has been held annually, with exception of the War Years, its title evolving from the Annual Show and Carnival to the Portishead Flower Show and Country Fair before relaunching as the Portishead Summer Show.

The Society purchased The Flower Show Field in 1951 for the sum of £700 (originally it was thought a mortgage would be needed but a committee member kindly provided the capital). The pavilion, previously purchased for £28 was moved from a field at the end of the High Street and is still used today, as the Show Office, which only goes to show how well built it was. The field has recently been given "community asset" status which protects it for future generations. The Show is wholly funded by members of the Horticultural Society (no Town Council funding) and currently costs around £33,000. Income from visitors, traders and food and drink concessions is needed to cover costs – losses mean that Society members' bank balances fall! Society membership has fallen from its 1990's heyday of 300 members to today's 120 with around 25 longstanding patrons. In the face of a number of years of losses, Linda was fortunate to discover a source of help - the Association of Show and Agricultural Organisations - an umbrella organisation for agricultural, horticultural, equine and countryside events run by Show people with years of experience, offering advice on everything from legislation, health and safety to marketing and best practice. A secretary of another Show kindly came along to our Show to review how we went about things and followed up with a 12 page report! Following his advice we then reviewed all elements of the Show, including changing the name (designing a new logo to go with it), the marquee layout and provider, the ticketing and the website. Our social media presence was increased and transformed. The Country Fair theme and the traditional elements such as Punch and Judy were maintained but focus shifted to include acts which invited children to participate. Trade Stand options were made more attractive, including a website listing. This helped with Trade enquiries as Traders could see if there would be similar stands – we now have the issue of having to turn people away as the slots are so popular! Pre-Show publicity is vital – "advertorials" in Enjoy, The Resident, Bristol Magazine and Country Gardener sell a lot of tickets, as does putting up banners around the Town and Facebook posts. Website and social media traffic is analysed in detail to help ensure we get the most bang for our advertising bucks! The effect of the one thing we have no control over – the weather – has been mitigated by selling discounted advance tickets.

Linda has a newspaper cutting about the 1976 Show: "Despite the growth of Portishead from a village to a small Town the annual Show has managed to retain its rural charm and traditional country atmosphere over the years".

48 years later and with the massive expansion of the Town, this statement still holds true!! In the discussion which followed, the benefits of investing in an increased online presence were highlighted. Also, the challenges of "keeping the show on the road" by bringing younger people in to help. Other companies and organisations represented included Brampton Services Ltd, Children's Hospice South West, Martha's Kitchen, Now Hear This Music, OK TALK, Portishead Foodbank Outlet, Portishead Porters, the rebranded Portishead Youth **and Community** Centre (reflecting the fact their services are of interest/use across the whole community!), Smart Office Support and Vula Amehlo Trust.

The next Gordano Rotary Giving Back event will be on 28th November, at which we'll hear an update on corporate volunteering initiatives - SAVE THE DATE!