

OPEN GARDENS REPORT

The weather for our Open Gardens event on the 11th/12th June was very kind. We had sunshine and a bit of a breeze for most of the weekend after the early morning cloud had disappeared. This year we had 18 gardens open – a record for us. The gardens were a mixture of coastal, town, flat and hilly, large and small, but every one of them had interest and variety to please all tastes. Visitor numbers were in excess of 500 but because of the large number of gardens to see, people were able to spread themselves about the town quite easily.

The two new gardens in North Weston were nothing short of stunning and drew many admiring comments from visitors. Maggie and Peter Payton's garden at Stoke Cottage looked its best and people admired the Crambe which is full of frothy loveliness in early June. Also popular with visitors was the wrought iron sphere bird feeder which hangs from a magnolia tree and attracts many finches and other small birds allowing them to feed in safety in its middle.

Lindsay and David Smith's garden was a real treat and cleverly divided into "rooms" to include a wildflower meadow and a woodland, as well as a vegetable patch right at the back. This garden will be open again later this year when Lindsay and David re-enact life during World War Two. The whole family joined in with refreshments.

Angela Cooper and family in Forester Road is another of our new gardens that has a lovely view towards St Peter's Church. Angela has single handedly tended this garden and is hoping to buy a bit more from St Peter's School to extend it. During the coming year a summerhouse will be erected together with an orchard and wild flower meadow.

Many people have never seen St Peter's Church Millennium Garden so we always include it in our programme. Our "Friends" working party often holds sessions there to help out the parishioners. It is now ten years old and is very peaceful. It is often used for wedding photography.

Valerie Hampshire's garden in Victoria Square is becoming a real favourite. It is a very pretty as well as a practical garden. The roses have benefited enormously from lashings of manure and the raised vegetable beds must reflect what has happened down through the decades when previous families were fed from produce grown in the garden. Because the garden is flat, elderly local residents enjoyed sitting in the sunshine and enjoying Valerie's refreshments.

Port Marine is always a favourite venue for visitors wishing to get ideas for small gardens and Anne Couzens and Graham Dufty's garden does not disappoint with the way it wraps itself around the house. It is a beautifully designed garden that is planted with some very unusual shrubs and perennials. One little boy was so enthralled with the little hiding place that he found to sit in that he didn't want to leave!

Pam and Robert Beckham delighted many visitors, not only because the model train was running around one of the garden beds, but also because of the exhibition of art put on by the Portishead Painters. Pam put in a lot of work to display the paintings and consequently many were sold, including one by a very new painter, which enabled the group to give us a very generous donation. Robert

and Pam were puzzled first thing on Saturday morning as the newly planted daisies had disappeared – the culprits were the local crows who were taking them for nesting material! This garden is situated in a very pleasant spot close to the Open Air Swimming Pool and attracted casual passers by after their swim.

Cheryl and Aziz's Muscaty's garden has three lovely ponds that have been cleverly designed. The house once included next door's half as well and served as a Red Cross hospital for casualties in World War One. Refreshments were served and plants sold in aid of the M.S. Society. If you wish to buy reasonably priced plants, Cheryl has them for sale in front of the house in Woodhill Road all through the summer.

We were pleased to get our roof garden finished at No. 45 Nore Road in time for the Open Gardens event this year. It proved a very welcome extra and most people were surprised at the view that has been opened up of the Lake Grounds and beyond. A few people were also privileged to see a young deer in the grounds of the old St Joseph's Convent. We sold many plants and served up many lunches and teas and were grateful for the lovely comments made by our visitors.

As a last minute extra to our programme, visitors enjoyed the jazz which was played by first year university students in Ann and Martin Sterland's lovely terraced garden. The good weather meant that many people lingered over Ann's refreshments while they enjoyed the jazz and also bought some of Ann's home reared plants.

Mike and Christine Vale's garden must have amazed everyone. This upward sloping garden has been terraced and planted up with some wonderful specimens, including the Crinodendron (the lantern tree), which was at its best during June. As you climb up and along the pathways, admiring the scenery as well as the plants, the top part comes as a complete surprise as it encompasses the backs of neighbouring gardens giving the garden a "T" shape. The mature trees give the large area here a lovely woodland feel. It may come as a surprise to hear that some local people were actually born at Riverbank when it was a maternity home. Mike and Christine did a great job selling raffle tickets and made a considerable amount of money for us.

Dennis Escourt's delightful garden in Pinecroft, back and front, was once again host to Willa Ashworth's ironwork. These wonderful pieces are designed and made by Willa and add an extra dimension to any garden of any size. We were really grateful to Dennis for joining in again.

Colin and Molly Lewis in Hillcrest Road have been opening their garden for us ever since we started eight years ago and always do well with their good value cream teas. They also open for the National Gardens Scheme so visitors are guaranteed a real treat.

Pat Brew's beautiful sloping garden stretches almost down from Hillcrest Road to Nore Road and is packed with interest. Deer can be troublesome here, so Pat has turned the bottom part of the garden over to wildlife. Pat single-handedly tends the garden and her potted trees are of particular interest and prove, that if you are determined and skilful, you can grow anything in a pot! Pat put on a

“hunt the cat” challenge for children which was popular. She also raised £150 for the Alzheimer's charity which we are all very pleased with.

Jude Webb in Down Road, very kindly joined us for the first time this year, dovetailing the weekend in nicely between her extensive travelling! Her pretty garden has many features, including mature shrubs, a pond and a sitting area.

Ken & Beryl Windibank open their garden every year for us and support Portishead in Bloom in many ways. Their garden is appreciated by passers-by every summer as the annual bedding and containers reach maturity. Every year they raise money for us by selling Ken's plants which he raises from seed but this year the whole family joined in and did a wonderful lunch session on both days. News soon filtered out that the soup in particular was delicious and the weekend finished with a practically full sell out of home produced food. Our grateful thanks to the Windibank family for their whole-hearted support.

Janet and Chris O'Dea's garden on the site of the old St Barnabas iron church drew many admiring comments again. The garden is beautifully designed and further enhanced by the large wooden “O” by the pond, the latest acquisition. This is the sort of the garden that just when you think you have seen everything, something new takes your eye. It is a wonderful garden to relax in for its owners, as well as visitors. Janet had been collecting books all year and the low prices attracted a bumper buy up which resulted in just over £100 for our funds.

And finally, another delightful new garden for us in the historic setting of Stoney Steep off West Hill, a hidden surprise for lots of visitors. Gill and Jon Gething's garden at Jasmine Cottage has raised beds for vegetable growing, mature trees and a garden pond. Unfortunately and very sadly, the chickens that could have been viewed over the neighbouring wall had been taken by a fox since the programme was printed. Jon and Gill are pioneers of the Transition Towns movement in Portishead and hopefully many people became more aware of this after visiting Jasmine Cottage.

Our lucky programme and raffle prizes went to well deserved winners. The Windmill voucher was won by Vera Aldridge and the John Lewis voucher was won by Irene Cameron, both Portishead residents. The M & S voucher went to Sharon Cross, one of the helpers in Angela Cooper's garden. The numbers were picked by a random draw site on the Internet. Mary of Victoria Square won the raffle held in Mike & Christine Vale's garden in Nore Road who picked out the winning ticket.

Our grateful thanks to our sponsors who were Brackenwood Garden Centre and Anita's Nursery for the raffle prizes, to Ron Ponsford (Insurance) for the lucky programme prizes and to Burleigh Press for printing the programmes, free of charge for us.

Portishead in Bloom relies on the Open Gardens weekend being a major fund raising event as well as an enjoyable and informative weekend for our many visitors – well over 500 this year. Our watering costs and plant buying alone represents a great deal of money but everyone loves the carousels and tubs in and around the High Street, so the £4,700 that was raised at this event because of everyone's generosity will go a long way towards paying our bills. A big thank you to all our visitors.

Of course, a very special and a huge thank you must go to all our gardeners, To open up your garden to the public calls for an immense commitment and a great deal of hard work not only in planning but in carrying out the necessary work. Many of our gardeners did "extras" such as refreshments, plant raising/selling and other delightful enticements so we owe them a huge debt of gratitude.

We are planning to host the event again next year – our 9th – on the second week-end of June (the 11th/12th), just before the Carnival so please, if you would like to join us, make a note in next year's diary. To keep the event lively and appealing we would like some new gardens for our visitors to enjoy, so another plea, if you are tempted and would like to talk it through please give me a ring on 01275 843566.

Sandy Tebbutt
On behalf of Portishead in Bloom