

The Rusland Valley Horticultural Society (RVHS)

The Rusland Valley Horticultural Show is held on the third Saturday in August.

It began in 1871 when a group of six farmers and gardeners came up with the idea of holding a small flower show and plant sale. The event, held in the Old School at Rusland, (The Reading Rooms) was an immediate success and soon attracted the whole community by introducing children's competitions and races. As the show grew it moved sites - first to a field near Rusland Vicarage and then to its present site in Whitestock Meadow.

The original tent committee bought some small tents with their own money and sub-let them to the society until it could afford to buy-out the tent committee. The tents were much smaller in those days, were followed by Bell Tents and eventually the eight marquees that now line the show field. As the shift was made from small to large tents, gaps would appear and so the gardener from Rusland Hall would bring large displays of flowers and plants to create a more abundant atmosphere. These days the marquees are filled with exhibits of home produce, handicrafts, children's competitions and, of course, good quality horticulture. There is also the beer tent, where there is a good crack and the catering tent (which in the early days was run by the local ladies).

The real delight of the show is the taking part. As a great grandchild of one of the founding members, I will be eternally grateful for having learnt the pleasures of horticulture and baking, the importance of community and the value of Lakeland customs. There is always the possibility that you could win one of the thirty trophies that are presented each year and there is a certain amount of kudos attached to this, particularly if there has been a high standard in the tents or out on the field.

At the opposite end of the show field to the marquees are the hound trails. These began after the First World War and have remained popular. It is one of those events where work behind the scenes will never be seen. Over the years there have only been a few people who have laid these trails with the rags covered in aniseed. Very often it has been the same person who has made the 10 mile walk around the fells and valley on show day for at least ten consecutive years until eventually the job was passed on to someone else. In one case one of these chaps would lay the trail, come back to the show and run the fell race!

Displays in the show ring range from falconry to clog dancing and there is a full programme of races on the track and five fell races. The fell-running events have always been popular and in the 1950s and 60s competitors would arrive by the bus-load from far and wide. Ask any of those who do compete and they will tell you that Rusland Show is a very special event on the running

calendar. Fifty years before the London Marathon was even thought of there was a character who would run 22 miles on show day (around the track) just for the spectacle and sheer joy of it.

There even used to be a special bus service from Ulverston for the general public to come to the show as it was considered one of the 'must do' things each year. Compare that now to at least 500 cars visiting and we can see an obvious change in lifestyles. This can create a slight logistical problem if the show has been blessed with rain but even pushing cars out of the mud and back onto the road has always been carried out in a jovial manner by the show committee and volunteers.

It is this ethos and esprit de corps that keeps the show going and there are many involved who accomplish tasks with no fuss, just a quiet commitment. Here I will mention someone who, during the week before the show, would stop on his way home from working at Grizedale, for the Forestry Commission, and mark out some of the athletics tracks. He would repeat this each night to make sure the job was finished by Saturday.

There is in fact a great deal of work that goes on behind the scenes, from arranging the judges to handing out the prize money, sorting out the chaos of the pet show and children's fancy dress to marking out the marquees for the exhibits, erecting marquees and organising the craft demonstrators, stewards and publishing. After the show has finished there is the tidying up and dismantling of the marquees. Enthusiasm has been known to wane slightly when volunteers were required previously to take down the latrines after the show! A silent pleasure is now felt since the arrival of "Portaloos" and the responsibility of their removal is certainly not missed. It is quite a task for those farmers and gardeners who, for five generations have tended to this event.

The RVHS Committee is an eclectic mix of sportsmanship, rivalry, camaraderie, humour and graft. And the show has become symbolic of a thriving community that works together through thick and thin (wet and dry!), using the local people, skills and resources available to create a great day out. Only the external forces of two world wars and the Foot and Mouth Disease of 2001 have prevented this team of stalwarts from getting on with the job!

The Rusland Valley Horticultural Society always offers a warm welcome with a good hearted crowd, a fine display of talent, plenty of entertainment and competitions galore but the show is much more than that. In this ever-changing world, the RVHS has kept a foot in tradition while adapting with the times and always seeking to retain the true essence of the show. Through dedication and passion, friendship and hard work, the continuity of skills and experience has kept on flowing from generation to generation for nearly 140 years and all from a few flower seeds.

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