

# BOOM TOWN

Garstang may be a small, but it's never been afraid to take its place on the worldwide stage. **Louise Bryning** finds out how fairness is at the heart of everything they do

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **DARREN ANDREWS**

**T**his year marks the 20th anniversary of Garstang deciding to become the world's first Fairtrade Town and it has been booming ever since.

In 2000, Garstang residents voted for a step which a government minister declared could 'spread like wildfire across the whole of the country and beyond'. Where Garstang led, more than 400 other towns and organisations worldwide have followed.

Garstang became a Fairtrade Town to promote the sale of products carrying the Fairtrade Mark, a label that guarantees producers in developing countries get a fair deal. And it wasn't just a gimmick as 20 years on, Fairtrade in Garstang is still going strong.

"We work to persuade local businesses to sell Fairtrade products and for people to buy and use them," said Ruth Bruce, a member of Garstang Fairtrade Steering Group for 10 years and its current chair. "We also work with organisations like the Brownies and Guides and have ambassadors who visit primary schools to talk about Fairtrade."

Pledge certificates are given to those agreeing to use FairTrade products and the message is carried through to Wesleys, a Fairtrade café, and the Mustard Seed One World and Fairtrade shop, both housed in the town's Methodist Church.

**'Garstang is a beautiful historic market town with a lot to offer'**

Plans to celebrate the 20th anniversary include a Fairtrade afternoon tea in Garstang Arts Centre on August 23 and Fairtrade Fortnight will be marked from February 24 to March 8.

But it's not just being a Fairtrade Town that puts Garstang on the international map. In 2008, after participating in Britain in Bloom for almost 20 years, the town won the gold award in the prestigious Entente Florale competition and Garstang's success in these contests continues, thanks to a strong community effort and a band of voluntary 'Bloomers' who ensure the town is kept spick and span all year round.

Recently, Garstang won gold in the Small Town category of the nationwide Britain in Bloom competition and also received





the RHS Discretionary Award – Wise Ways with Water – thanks to its innovative water collection process from Booths supermarket roof which helps all the town's flowers and plants to thrive. At the RHS North West in Bloom Awards, Garstang won another gold and also the Best Small Town Trophy. Kepple Lane Park won gold in the Small Parks category and the Millennium Green, Sandbriggs Court, Garstang Marina and Woodlands (Oak Road) were all deemed 'outstanding'.

So what's the secret of Garstang's success?

"Well, we've been at it a long time so a good foundation has been built for our current team," said Garstang In Bloom chairman, Alan Pearson. "But it's not all about the flowers, the judges also look at how we involve the community and how environmentally friendly the town is."

Each year, the Bloom team usually choose a theme and for 2020, there's likely to be two – the 75th anniversary of VE Day and the Fairtrade 20th anniversary. Flowers and Fairtrade are just two of the reasons why Garstang is a popular place to visit and shop.

But Luke Pollard, for one, won't let the town rest on its laurels. In 2018, the chairman of Independent Garstang Traders (IGT) who runs Printmob in the town, was shortlisted as a national High Street Hero in the Great British High Street Awards. He has doubled the membership of IGT, which has won a Wyre Business Award and Garstang Town Council's Community Award.

He also implemented a Love Garstang loyalty card scheme and developed a website for the town, as well as helping to deliver the Victorian Christmas Festival and Garstang Ice Cream Festival.



Chair of Independent Garstang Traders, Luke Pollard



Naomi Walker, owner of Bombshell Betty Boutique



"Garstang is a beautiful historic market town with a lot to offer and for 2020, the IGT are completing the development of a new Shop Garstang website which will be an online market place for local businesses to sell their products," said Luke.

"We're also working on expanding our Bonnets & Bunnies and Turn Garstang Orange events that bring in hundreds of families from all over the area. We hope to launch our first makers market too, giving some of our fabulous home-based businesses an opportunity to gain more exposure."

Its wide range of independent shops distinguishes Garstang from many other similar-sized towns. And among the oldest is Carrs jewellers which celebrates its 200th anniversary this year. The family business is now run by Damian Carr who learned techniques from his father and grandfather. This Fellow of the Gemmological Association can boast a wide portfolio of jewellery and clients nationwide. He has also designed and created pieces for Blackburn Cathedral.

Damian said their continued success is due to the personal service that only towns like Garstang can provide.

"Retail generally has changed in the past 20 years. It's much more service-led and ➔





David and Damian Carr, of Carr Jewellers

people are looking for places that are offering something different. Our staff are friendly and so is our attitude to business and people like that, whether they're buying a watch battery or a beautiful diamond ring."

**A**nother advocate for Garstang's business community is Naomi Walker, owner of Bombshell Betty boutique, which recently received the seal of approval from fashion expert, Gok Wan.

Naomi joined the television presenter's Style and Body Masterclass in Blackpool and showcased looks for all shapes and sizes from their latest collections. Naomi set up her boutique in Garstang four years ago.

"I saw a gap in the market so decided to go for it and I absolutely love Garstang. It's a great community with a lot of independent businesses which support their local community in turn. People spend with me and I spend in our community."

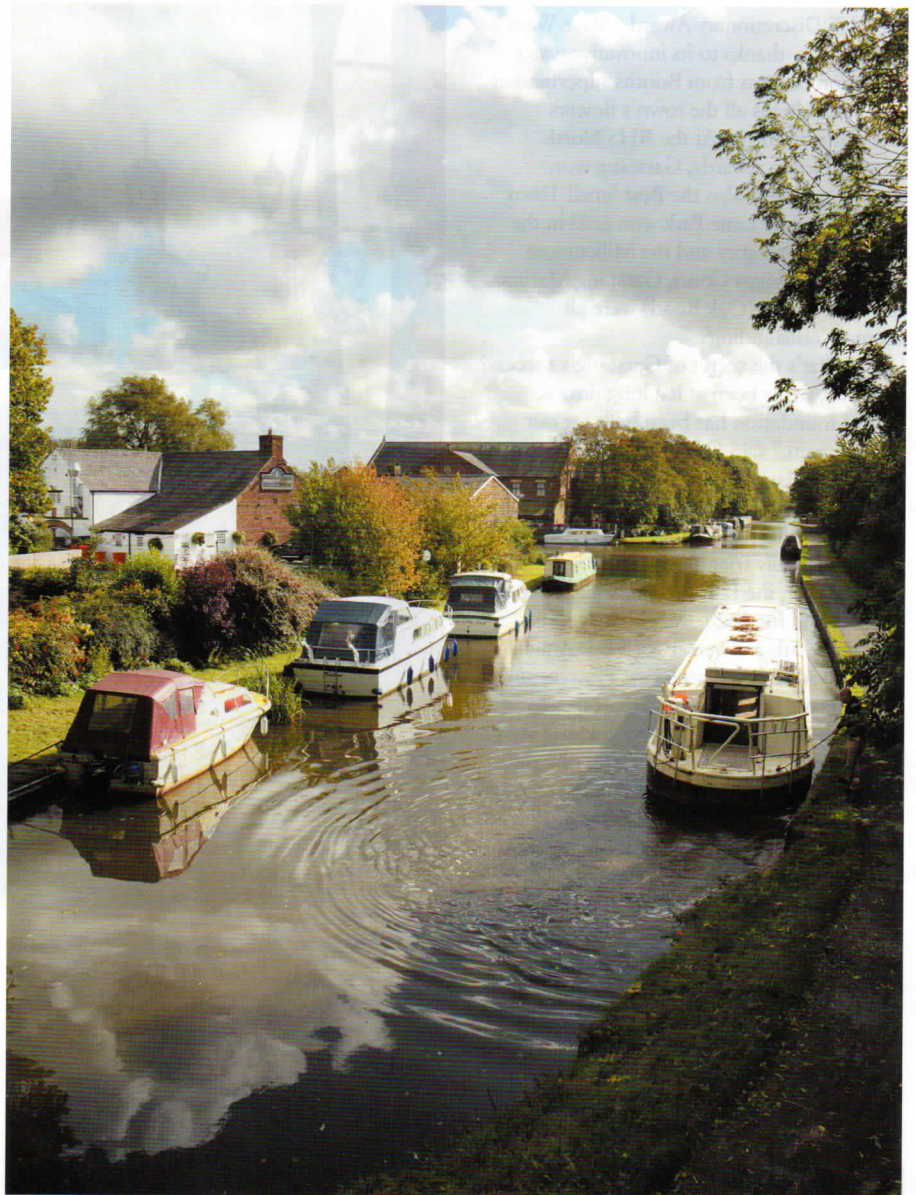
But visitors to Garstang shouldn't be surprised that the entrepreneurial spirit continues to thrive in a town first granted a Market Charter by Edward II in 1310.

The Market Cross, erected in 1887 to mark Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, is a town landmark and, as well as an indoor market, the town still hosts a traditional outdoor market along High Street every Thursday.

In the 18th Century, Garstang boasted 13 pubs and taverns thanks to its location as an important staging post for mail and passenger coaches, and among its most famous visitors were Robert the Bruce, Bonnie Prince Charlie and Oliver Cromwell, who brought their armies through the town.

Garstang was also famous for its cattle, horse and cheese fairs, livestock and grain markets and being at the centre of a rural community is still important to the town. One of its most popular annual events is the agricultural show which began in 1809 and returns in August.

And Garstang's enthusiasm for special events is endless as it has festivals dedicated to the arts, walking, children, scarecrows, ice cream, Christmas and even beer and gin. You can't say fairer than that! **1**



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