



CHRIS OPIE

An Interview with our Chief Showyard Director

What does the role of Showyard Director entail?

The Showyard Directors are responsible for setting out the ground, liaising with each of the sections so that everything they need is where they'd like it to be; we're essentially an events management team. We are responsible for the physical build of the show; fencing, marking out of trade stands, deliver all the equipment around the showground to the various sections and sort any problems that crop up along the way. The majority of the work that we do is done before the Monday of show day - we like to enjoy our show day and on the day itself, we only deal with any problems if they arise.



Chris Opie with his wife, Helen, when he was President in 2016

How long have you been involved in the show?

I've been on the committee since I was about 15 or 16 and I've been helping since I was about 10 - which is about 50 years now! I've been visiting show for my whole life - I probably first visited in a pram!

What is your earliest memory?

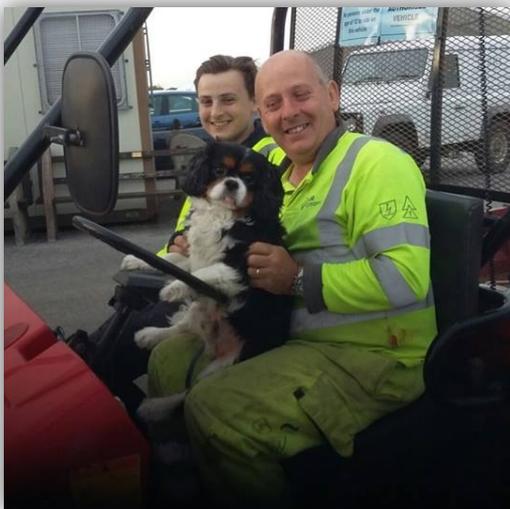
I remember showing cows with my Grandfather when the showground was in the playing field in the village. I can also remember watching the show being built from the school and it was a really exciting build up - it really was a highlight of our year as children! Even the children that didn't attend the show were excited for the show build and I remember seeing the tractors and trailers arriving on the showground with lots of equipment being dragged over from my Grandfather's piggery at Foundry - I think the old piggeries are buried now!

When does the physical set up of the show begin?

About three weeks before the show day we start marking out the tents and start to move things out of our big shed; things that don't hurt sat in the rain, like the sheep hurdles!

How many people does it take to build the show?

Oh my goodness, where do I start! First there's the five or six Showyard Directors, we have teams of young farmers attend to help with the Arts, Crafts & Cookery and Sheep sections and around 20 attend each of these, each section has a dozen or more helpers in the run up to show, I think about 30 people turn up to build the horse section and the cattle section must be a similar number - it must be well over 100 people set the show up and running it on show day will be considerably more than twice that!



Chris during show set up with his son, Matthew.



Chris with some of the Showyard Directors

couple of days are hard work to get everything taken down and packed away – it's also tinged with sadness as it means we have to wait a whole year to do it all again.

What's your most dramatic memory of Stithians Show?

On the old showground, back in the 1980s, I can remember we had so much rain everything had to be carried in by hand from the road because the field was so wet and the ground was so soft; there were huge ruts where the ground had been churned up, it was a real mess! I always remember the last to arrive was the guy with the sweet stall arriving at about 10pm the night before the show and he was dragged into the ground by a tractor – it was the same for arrivals the following morning; there was so much mud everywhere! We were really lucky that during the show the sunshine came out and the ground then dried out so much that everybody was able to drive out again. That year was such a nightmare – it was the only year we almost cancelled the show, we even had a meeting on the Sunday night to discuss it and it was agreed the show must go on! I'm glad it did.

A few years later, on the new showground where we base the show now, the Domestic (now Arts, Crafts & Cookery) tent blew down and the marquee providers had to collapse the whole structure with everything still in it and rebuild it shorter because of the damage. It reduced from about 150ft to 100ft, this was on the Sunday afternoon, I hasten to add, the day before the show. Some of the team were in tears as they just couldn't imagine how it was going to be built in time. What was so incredible was how everybody mucked in and helped to set up the tent again – it was a major exercise and I still marvel at how it was achieved!

With two years in a row of not being able to have Stithians Show as we know it, how has this affected your life ?

It's left a big hole in my life for most of the summers as I have nothing to do now! I've had to keep myself busy by doing lots of improvements to our house – I've become quite good with a paint brush!

What do you most look forward to at show time?

Six o'clock on Monday morning which is show day. As I approach the showground, I get butterflies in my stomach at the anticipation of the show day ahead of us; I just love the start of the show and all the excitement to come.

What's the hardest part of the show build?

Taking it down! [he laughs!]

How long does it take to clean up after the event?

After the euphoria of the show, the next couple of days are hard work to get everything taken down and packed away – it's also tinged with sadness as it means we have to wait a whole year to do it all again.



Chris on Show Day

