



Opening doors

HOWEVER MUCH one tries to prepare for one's year in office, the experience is full of the unexpected, as well as infinite moments of delight and poignancy. With my background in education I thought one of my earliest engagements was relatively straightforward, addressing children at their morning assembly. That was until four-year-old Josh asked in such an earnest manner: 'When you become High Sheriff are you given a camel?'

At the reception after our Declaration before Lady Hale, my counterpart in West Sussex, Denise Patterson, and I both stated that we had deliberately decided not to choose a theme for our year, preferring instead to keep our options open. That is not to say that I had not planned some key events, one of which was facilitating a conference on brain injury for the Kent, Surrey and Sussex Air Ambulance attended by

over 150 delegates. They came to learn from internationally renowned specialists and the conference concluded with an evening reception for local dignitaries and a talk: 'Drunken Fish and Getting the Blues: the Story of Hypoxia'.

In actual fact a theme started to emerge very early on when I attended 'Unsung Heroes', an aptly named awards ceremony at Newhaven. At the heart of all that I have experienced in my first six months in office is the realisation of how much we owe all those who volunteer in almost all walks of life.

As much of my county is coastal, I have made the most of the opportunity to learn more about those unsung heroes who patrol our shores and seas. At Seaford I spent an afternoon (some of it on a quad bike!) with an inspiring group of young people, Seaford Lifeguards, who work most professionally to ensure the safety of visitors throughout the summer

Below: Maritime and Coastguard Agency training near Beachy Head: the High Sheriff wears the orange hat





months. In addition I have been out with crews from the RNLi and attended an evening training session with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. A sad fact is that Beachy Head has become an international focal point for many who wish to commit suicide, meaning that the volunteer crews from these agencies spend much of their time responding to such harrowing incidents. This is in spite of the amazing work done by the Beachy Head Chaplaincy Team, which has seventeen volunteers providing cover day and night throughout the year.

I had the honour of attending, with my splendid chaplain the Revd David Wallis, the 73rd anniversary commemoration ceremonies of the Dieppe Raid, which was launched from East Sussex. On 19 August I laid a wreath in three places, each site more moving than the previous one, a reminder of the devastating loss of hundreds of lives just on that one day. The citizens of Dieppe are assiduous in honouring the fallen, a moving example being school children placing a red rose on each grave in the Canadian war cemetery on the eve of the anniversary.

Overall, what is clear is that as High Sheriff when one door opens another door opens!

◆ Juliet Smith JP
High Sheriff of East Sussex 2015-16



Above: With Eastbourne RNLi before Sunday morning training at sea

Left: Front: Denise Patterson, High Sheriff of West Sussex; Baroness Hale, Deputy President of the Supreme Court; Juliet Smith
Back: Jonathan Taylor, outgoing High Sheriff of West Sussex; Chris Gebbie, outgoing High Sheriff of East Sussex