



Valete

BEING COMMANDED by Her Majesty to take command of the County of Gwent at her pleasure on Tuesday 2 April 2015 seemed a daunting prospect, but it was an immensely fulfilling year – and a huge honour to be High Sheriff.

I work full-time in Parliament running the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK. By dint of much juggling and an intimate interaction with GWR train times, doing both jobs worked out. The international outreach work we undertake in Parliament greatly informed the shrieval objectives I had set myself. They covered equalities, diversity and inclusion, and young people.

With some 578,000 people Gwent is the most populous county in Wales. It has seven parliamentary constituencies, five local authorities, a broad spectrum of old and new communities, some with a range of cultural heritages – and many with the same type of challenges. It has its own

police force, a cathedral, eight mosques, a Buddhist temple, two reserve regiments, and the wide range of uniformed youth organisations – Gwent's Young Dragons – but no High Court. Gwent 'built the world' from its iron, coal and steel industries. Now, despite some excellent regeneration and investment, the county contains some of the most deprived parts of UK.

2015 was a great year to be High Sheriff. Highlights included Magna Carta, Agincourt and a general election. Magna Carta was not good for the revenue streams of the Sheriffs in 1215. En route to the British Library Association members came to Parliament where the Clerk of the Commons regaled us with a view of Magna Carta, High Sheriffs and Parliament. Henry V was born in Monmouth Castle in 1386, so the 600th anniversary of Agincourt was a major event in Monmouth. A competition to design a town flag was initiated. The winning duo

of young students was presented with a brand new Monmouth town flag.

As returning officer for the Newport East and West constituencies, I spent Thursday 7 May visiting the dedicated staff in the polling stations and in the evening observed the count before announcing each set of results. In Wales the results are declared first in English, then in Welsh. As a non-Welsh speaker I was determined to meet the challenge. After much practice, it worked on the night – a great experience.

Although I sat alongside judges in district and family courts, not having any High Courts in Gwent gave more opportunities to travel throughout the county, meeting communities, organisations and people in all three sectors, listening and learning. Occasionally there are opportunities to facilitate. It also was a great pleasure to give 38 High Sheriff's Awards to celebrate, recognise and thank those who go the extra mile to help others.

In Gwent there is an especially close relationship with the police and the police and crime commissioner (PCC). The Gwent High Sheriff's Community Fund (GHSCF) holds an annual grant-making event – 'Your Voice, Your Choice' – a partnership with the PCC and the Community Foundation in Wales. Ian Johnston QPM, Gwent's PCC, generously has given £25,000 annually to the fund. This year he also agreed to match-fund up to another £25K. With generous support from General Dynamics, Meritor, NAS Gilwern, Waitrose, the Waterloo Foundation and individuals, that figure was reached. A record 65 community groups bid for financial support. On Saturday morning 19 March, the short-listed 28



Above: With Muslim community leaders in Newport

Below left: Visiting Newport Sea Cadets

Below: High Sheriff's Award to Tredegar Youth Café volunteers

Opposite page: High Sheriff's Award to Corporal Piper Meredith 275 (Nantyglo & Blaina) Squadron ATC. Her prompt first aid action saved her grandfather's life when he cut an artery

community groups gathered at Pontypool Leisure Centre to bid for up to £4,000 from the fund. Each group had two minutes to 'pitch' their project with the presentations then being scored by the other groups. The 23 projects assessed by their peers to be addressing the most pressing priorities shared in the grant pot of almost £75K.

Throughout the year I had the great privilege and fun of meeting the many committed volunteers and groups who work so hard to build safer and stronger communities across Gwent. They are a huge inspiration and the Awards event was a terrific culmination to what was a wonderful year. In Wales there are eight High Sheriffs and the 2015 posse was very close. I thank my fellow Welsh High Sheriffs for their friendship and support.

◆ Lieutenant Colonel
A S Tuggey DL
High Sheriff of Gwent 2015-16

