

NORFOLK

News from and about members



A little can go a long way

Below: Arthur Dannatt, swordbearer aged seven wearing 18th century Grenadier uniform, leads his grandmother and the Judges to Norwich Cathedral

INVARIABLY ONE of the first things anyone asks you as High Sheriff is 'So, how are you enjoying it?' An understandable question, but sometimes a difficult one to answer truthfully.

While deeply conscious of the honour of being asked to be High Sheriff, and of the privilege of following in both my father's and my grandfather's footsteps, I found I did not find love every moment. And having chosen mental health – and how mental health issues impact on the Criminal Justice Service – as the theme for my year, it was perhaps inevitable I would stumble across some

pretty harrowing stuff. There are few happy tales that come out of the cash-strapped world of NHS mental health care and even fewer from our prisons and our hostels. Making any sort of difference seemed a remote and impractical dream.

But I was quite wrong on that level at least, and imperceptibly something shifted. I can't quite put my finger on it, but shift it did, as surely and certainly as do the sands of our glorious eastern coastline. I found that while, of course, never being able to change the world big time, it was remarkable and humbling how as High Sheriff, one was able to influence some things for the small





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Left: Lord and Lady Dannatt at their garden party with Yeoman Warders from the Tower of London where Lord Dannatt is the Constable

charity, the volunteer, the patient, the ex-prisoner, the individual. And to me this is the huge strength of the appointment. It is a position that should be cherished and never underestimated. Here for me, lay the privilege of being High Sheriff.

Then came all sorts of bonuses that I had never looked for or anticipated. I found myself falling in love with the county of Norfolk in a new and totally unexpected way – Great Yarmouth, Kings Lynn... and all that lies under the wide and rolling skies between. Being High Sheriff gave me the freedom to explore; moreover to meet the raft of extraordinary men and women who share an equal passion for where they live and work, and for the indelible colour they bring to their towns and villages, schools and communities. I have visited

not only prisons and psychiatric units, but Gypsy encampments and undertakers too... and an awful lot in between.

I have relished every second in our wonderful courts of law, just as I have stood humbled yet enthralled under the soaring vault of our great Cathedral church; each stone soaked in the joys and fears, hopes and supplications of generation upon generation. For me it has been the greatest privilege of all to stand with them in the shadows, adding my prayers to theirs.

So what has impressed me most this year? It is not the parades and the parties – fun as they were. Instead it is two short words: human kindness. It is the compassion of the judge who agonises over his sentencing; the compassion shown by the young police officer to the abusive drunk, and by the ambulance crew to the lonely lady who dials 999 just because she wants to see a friendly face. It is the kindness of our prison visitors, and those who voluntarily support those with mental health issues within our communities that really make the difference. So was it fun? Not always, but that definitely is the wrong question to ask. The answer, of course, runs far deeper than that. And for the opportunity and privilege of being allowed to discover that answer for myself, I am forever grateful.

Below: Assembled outside the west door of Norwich Cathedral for the justice service

◆ The Lady Dannatt MBE

High Sheriff of Norfolk 2014-15

