



Police protection

A LIFETIME'S practice in law has taught me that good preparation and groundwork are essential. So, attendance at the Burghley House seminars and the regional gatherings, shadowing one's predecessors, making introductions and learning protocol were all essential. How often had I heard the expression 'if you cannot hit the ground running you may never catch up'.

I did the homework and felt that I was ready... until a tricky juxtaposition of the legal term and Easter meant that in less than 36 hours after making my Declaration I was privileged to attend the Royal Maundy Service and be presented to HM The Queen. A once-in-a-lifetime honour was almost derailed by a comical police sergeant who, at the identification and security checkpoint, asked me if I really thought I would be permitted to take that sword into a cathedral flying the Royal Standard! A momentary frisson as I stared at my court shoes, then I glanced up to see a twinkle in his eye and a slight smile beginning to form. I got his number... A memorable start and a huge privilege for the city of Sheffield and not least for me.

One week later preparing for my role as returning officer for the parliamentary elections, I attended a briefing given by

Doncaster Council's Chief Executive (acting returning officer) and her election team regarding the process and preparation for the general election. I had opted to exercise the right to read the declaration of result for Doncaster North, the seat held by Mr Miliband. There seemed every likelihood that the Labour candidate would retain his seat and secure a sufficient majority to form a coalition and thus the next government.

Fast forward to the night of 7 May and the early hours of 8 May; I witnessed a flawless count and verification process for all three of the Doncaster constituencies. As forecast, the count was complete by 4.00 am but had to be delayed pending the arrival of the candidates. I remained on standby for many minutes at the side of the stage supported by a single police officer: none other than the same sergeant from the Maundy Service! He stayed to see me read the declaration at 5.25 am before a significant proportion of the world's press and television.

The sergeant and I met twice more: in May, he was part of a police demonstration of tactics deployed during public disorder, an event staged during South Yorkshire Young Leaders' Day; and more recently he was again on duty for the visit of HRH The Princess Royal to a charity lunch.



Above: The High Sheriff and Mrs Holt leaving the Cathedral

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More than once I have been asked which occasion or memory I value the most. Several spring to mind but perhaps the answer lies somewhere between the fundraiser for an Asperger's youth club with an excellent race night and a community cohesion exercise for an attentive madrasa which listened carefully to a talk about the High Sheriff's role with reference to Magna Carta. This surely indicates the wonderfully diverse nature that the role affords to the county rather than the enjoyment one secures from it.

I look forward enormously to an equally busy programme over the next six months, in the belief that I shall surely meet up with the same police officer again...

◆ John R Holt DL

High Sheriff of South Yorkshire 2015-16



Left: The Yeoman guarding the royal party on leaving Sheffield Cathedral