



Essex 2013-14

I began my year with a challenge. Essex Boys and Girls Clubs asked me to bicycle from Loughton to Braintree – fifty miles – visiting five clubs en route to raise their profile and gain publicity. They called it the High Sheriff's Challenge and at lunchtime on Saturday 4 May, cycling into the wind, cold and tired, I realised why! The highlight was my visit to Brentwood Youth Amateur Boxing Club, which was out in strength to welcome me. Once in the ring, I presented Boxing GCSE Progress Awards and then two seniors gave a sparring display. The club provides meaningful activity for young people, who can call in at any time, and Bex, the 'mum', is an ever-present listening ear.

That day I cycled through four of the 14 civic districts in Essex. Inspired by an idea put forward by a former Cambridgeshire High Sheriff at the 2011 Eastern Regional Meeting, I asked to meet the Community Safety Officer in each of our districts and requested that the Mayor or Chairman show me something of which they were proud and something which was a concern. Consequently, I learnt about safety initiatives throughout the county and



PHOTOGRAPH: JONATHAN AMORY

Essex Chronicle publicity for the High Sheriff's Challenge.



PHOTOGRAPH: RALPH MELOY

Opening the Friends of Essex Churches Trust Christmas Fair at Hylands House, Chelmsford.

I visited charities and voluntary groups that had been awarded funding at the High Sheriff's Awards.

In Tendring I walked round Jaywick, the most deprived ward in England, and chatted to a community payback team laying a path, while in Uttlesford I went to the magnificent new concert hall in Saffron Walden. At Thurrock in the shadow of the Queen Elizabeth Bridge, I visited High House Production Park, where all the sets are built for the Royal Opera House; later in my year I went back there for the visit of TRH The Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall. At the seminar at Burghley and at regional meetings, it has been a pleasure to meet other High Sheriffs in my year, with whom I have been able



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to do a number of visits. Judge Advocate Emma Peters invited the High Sheriff of Greater London and me to sit with her at the Court Martial at Colchester Garrison. After lunch in the Officers' Mess, she accompanied us on a tour of the Military Corrective Training Centre, the only one in the UK, for servicemen and women detained for periods from 14 days up to two years. The training programmes are impressive. We saw the tiling and tyre-fitting workshops and met some of the detainees.

Keen to assist with rehabilitation of ex-offenders, I arranged a visit to HMP Holloway (where women prisoners from Essex are held) for Sarah Senker, the organiser of the Women's Project for Open Road, the leading drug and alcohol addiction support charity in East Anglia. This programme provides guidance and support for female ex-offenders on behalf of Essex Probation. Sarah and I were delighted to be joined by the High Sheriff of Hertfordshire.

One of my final appointments was with the High Sheriff of Bedfordshire. Mrs Justice Parker DBE, Family Division Liaison Judge for the South Eastern (2) Circuit, had invited us both to sit with her at the Royal Courts of Justice and have lunch in Middle Temple Hall. It was an enormous privilege and a fitting end to my year as High Sheriff, which had commenced with the nomination ceremony in the Court of the Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales. □

Julia Abel Smith DL
High Sheriff of Essex 2013-14



In the boxing ring at Brentwood Youth Amateur Boxing Club.

PHOTOGRAPH: JULIETTOWNSEND



With the Great Notley Scouts at the Community Walk to raise funds for the High Sheriffs' Fund.

PHOTOGRAPH: EDMUND ABEL SMITH