



## Unity in diversity

**Above:** Before the Annual Justice Service in Birmingham with the Hon Mrs Justice Carr DBE, Senior Presiding Judge of the Midland Circuit

'YOUR YEAR will fly by,' they said. 'You will learn so much about the county,' they said. 'Do it in your own style,' they said. I am grateful to my predecessors as High Sheriff for the advice and guidance given in the period leading to my Declaration ceremony on Tuesday of Holy Week this year. As my fellow High Sheriffs will attest, not all the advice one receives before taking office is consistent and some of it reflects the styles and mores of a previous generation, but all is well intentioned and serves to help a new High Sheriff come to terms with the demands of the role.

One piece of helpful advice was to recognise the many ways in which the West Midlands differs from most other counties. We are a largely urban county with three cities (Coventry, Birmingham and Wolverhampton) and four boroughs (Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull and Walsall). We are a young

county, dating from 1974 and a highly diverse county with a rich variety of ethnicities and creeds. My motto for the year has been 'unity in diversity' with the aim of highlighting those characteristics we have in common rather than emphasising those that can be used to divide us. How fitting then that my very first appointment on the evening of my Declaration was to join members of the local Bangladeshi community in a refurbished cinema in Perry Barr, celebrating the 40th anniversary of the founding of their state.

The City of Coventry is an ancient one and, after suffering more than many with the challenges of the post-industrial economy, is enjoying something of a resurgence thanks to the hard work of its council, local companies and its many volunteers. It will be the City of Culture in 2021. I have enjoyed renewing my acquaintance with



its iconic cathedrals and its ancient city guilds. Attending the annual Guild Service and dining in the ancient Guild Hall were particular pleasures, as was joining the Archbishop of Canterbury for lunch when he came to renew old acquaintances and mark the centenary of the Anglican diocese of Coventry.

In the north of the county, the boroughs of Dudley, Sandwell and Walsall, together with the City of Wolverhampton, lie at the heart of the Black Country, the cauldron of the Industrial Revolution. Each of these places has proud traditions and together they are rich in civic pride. Their strong support for the armed services was evident on Armed Forces Day when, over a single weekend, I attended events in all four places. A particular highlight was the Sunday afternoon spent at Himley Hall in Dudley when I had the great honour of meeting a 91-year-old veteran who was the only survivor from his fire-bombed tank at El Alamein. On a lighter note, wearing court dress this summer has been a particular challenge with the commanding officer at Himley Hall remarking to me after the formalities were over that ‘you, Sir, are clearly the most unsuitably dressed today – an honour which generally falls to me!’

I’ve enjoyed many military occasions thus far and space prevents me from mentioning them all. Witnessing RAF Cosford being awarded the Freedom of the Borough of Dudley and of the City of Birmingham were memorable occasions, but the highlight would have to be the visit of HRH the Duke of Cambridge to unveil a statue of Major



Frank Foley, an intelligence officer who, during the Second World War, was responsible for saving the lives of more than 10,000 Jews. Perhaps as a mark of a true hero, little of his courageous exploits was known until after he passed away quietly in 1958 in his home town of Stourbridge. For those interested to know more about our humble hero, I commend Michael Smith’s book *Frank Foley: the spy who saved 10,000 Jews. Every day is a school day.*

Above: With the Mayor of Dudley, Councillor Alan Taylor, after the unveiling of the statue of Major Frank Foley CMG by HRH the Duke of Cambridge

♣ **Chris Loughran**  
*High Sheriff of West Midlands 2018-19*



Before the Annual Justice Service in Birmingham (L-R): Rt Revd David Urquhart KCMG (Bishop of Birmingham), Laura Hone, Jane Loughran, Clare Sawdon JP (Warwickshire), Nat Hone DL (Herefordshire), Chris Loughran, Beverley Lindsay OBE (Vice Lord-Lieutenant, West Midlands), Rt Revd Mgr Daniel McHugh (Chaplain to the High Sheriff, West Midlands), Jane Roberts and Cassian Roberts (Worcestershire)