

# The Red Mass

**H**aving seen the Red Mass advertised for some years in the Summer issue of *The High Sheriff*, I thought I should know more about what we publish. A celebration of the start of the legal year at Westminster Cathedral, it is the Roman Catholic counterpart of the annual Anglican Judges' Service at Westminster Abbey.

Both denominations emphasise the origins of the Mass in the Middle Ages, when Judges and legal practitioners gathered on the first day of the Michaelmas Term at Westminster Abbey, next to Westminster Hall where the High Court sat, to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their work during the ensuing year. Following the Reformation, Roman Catholics were banned from holding all public appointments including judicial office, until their emancipation under the Roman Catholic Relief Act 1829. The service was revived in London by Roman Catholic lawyers in 1891, and obtained full official recognition in 1898 when the Lord Chief Justice attended. Lord Russell of Killowen, the first Roman Catholic to hold the office since the Reformation, was LCJ from 1894 to 1900.

Westminster Cathedral has hosted the Red Mass since 1904, the year after its fabric had been completed and masses were first said daily. This year's service was held on Wednesday 1 October at

9.30 am, almost in parallel with the Judges' Service at Westminster Abbey which it anticipated by exactly two hours – a scramble for some of its participants, not least the Master of the Temple Church, who are involved in both services. Attended by the Roman Catholic judiciary, barristers and solicitors, it takes its name from the red vestments worn by the principal celebrant, the Rt Revd Bishop Nicholas Hudson, Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster, and the other celebrants, especially the Canon lawyers. The Bishop preached on the need for 'compassion and that spirit of mercy' which allows defendants 'to retain their dignity and their hope'. He recalled the martyrdom in 1581 of St Ralph Sherwin, the first member of the English College in Rome to die for his faith (at the same time as Edmund Campion). On the Tyburn scaffold he smoked a last pipe and showed compassion by forgiving those responsible for his death.

Roman Catholic, and indeed other High Sheriffs will receive a warm welcome from the Cathedral and Diocesan clergy to join the procession at the Red Mass and the reception afterwards, so they should not hesitate to apply for a seat when the service is advertised in *The High Sheriff* next summer.

♥ **Andrew Wells**  
*Hon Editor, Kent 2005-06*

**Below left:** Sir Stanley Dewey Bt



**OPPOSITE PAGE**  
**Top right:** Judges hearing the sermon at Westminster Cathedral

**Right:** Rt Revd Bishop Nicholas Hudson with High Court Judges after the Red Mass

**Far right:** The Canon lawyers precede the bishop at the service



## Clerical High Sheriffs

For many generations it was believed that men, and now women of the cloth could not serve as High Sheriffs – law enforcement, military command and tax collection were assumed to be incompatible with a priestly calling. The Sheriffs Act 1887 is silent on the mutual exclusivity of High Sheriffs and clergy. The Privy Council is the final arbiter of eligibility and qualifications to hold office and in recent years has eased restrictions on appointment, in line with legislation to avoid unnecessary and unjustified discrimination. This magazine is grateful to the Privy Council Office for confirming the current practice.

Until 2005, the Privy Council Office

advised new High Sheriffs that 'Clergymen, whether beneficed or not' should not be included in nominations. This wording was used for over a century and is unambiguous, endorsed in many publications on the subject – eg *The High Sheriff* (*The Times*, 1961 – foreword by Gavin Astor, High Sheriff of Sussex 1955) and Dr Irene Gladwin's *The Sheriff: the Man and his Office* (1974).

In 2005, following the removal of High Court enforcement duties from High Sheriffs (Courts Act 2003, effective from March 2004), the Privy Council Office revised its instructions, and recent High Sheriffs and those in nomination will be aware that 'Members of the Clergy may

also serve as High Sheriff, but should consult their Bishop before accepting nomination'. This followed advice from the Archbishop of Canterbury's office that since priests could now become MPs and hold various other offices previously denied to them, it was felt that the Shrievalty should be no different. Note the change from 'Clergymen' to 'Clergy', acknowledging the first ordinations in the Church of England of women as deacons in 1987 and as priests in 1994. It is fitting that the first clerical High Sheriff to have taken office since this change was female, the Revd Fiona Sample, High Sheriff of Northumberland in 2011, closely followed by the Revd Rachel Benson in North Yorkshire in 2013. Where the women lead, the men follow, and there is at least one male clerical High Sheriff in nomination.

Although Staffordshire records state

that the Revd Sir Thomas Broughton Bt, became High Sheriff in 1772, in fact he was ordained in 1780. More recently the Revd Jonathan Peel (Norfolk 1984) and the Revd Edward Faure Walker (Hertfordshire 2000) were ordained after serving. So all these gentlemen, and doubtless other post-shrieval clergy, were operating within the rules. Chance research in another sphere revealed that rules are made to be broken.

The Revd Sir Stanley Daws Dewey, 2nd Baronet, of Peak House, Sidmouth, had been ordained in 1891, served as a parish priest and rural dean in Devon until 1927, and had somehow circumvented convention to become (aged 50) a subaltern (not a chaplain) in the 4th Volunteer Battalion of the Devon Regiment in 1917. The rules were bent again in 1935 when he made his Declaration as High Sheriff of Devon and was appointed a

Prebendary of Exeter Cathedral the same year. Only two years later the Reverend William Marshall, of Sarnesfield Court, Weobley (ordained in 1901 and Rector of Sarnesfield 1905-19), became High Sheriff of Herefordshire. The High Sheriff would welcome information about other instances where clergymen, beneficed or not, became High Sheriffs before the embargo was relaxed.

*The editor is grateful to Sir Anthony Dewey, Sir Stanley's grandson, and his daughter Delia Wingfield Digby, wife of the current High Sheriff of Suffolk, for providing the photograph of the shrieval Prebendary in court dress, wearing his silver jubilee medal and baronet's badge. History doesn't relate whether, as a clergyman, he wore a sword – probably he did.*