



Bedfordshire 2012-13

I approached my installation as High Sheriff of Bedfordshire with some trepidation but also with a determination to meet and help those less fortunate than myself, as my own journey from 'Homeless to High Sheriff' had been a long and difficult road. I also wanted to highlight the people and places of Luton and the south of the county, where my family, business and friends had all thrived. My third and (perhaps) most important aim was, together with my wife Lyn, to enjoy the whole experience to the full.

My installation took place at historic Putteridge Bury, Luton. This was followed by a visit to The Swiss Garden in Mid-Bedfordshire, and then to Keech Hospice Care to celebrate its 21st anniversary and launch of a book, *Tears and Laughter*, commemorating the patients, friends, staff and volunteers at this magnificent charity where I was once a trustee.

Civic services throughout the county followed, capped by a most enjoyable visit to the home of the Bishop of St Albans. I sat with His Honour Judge Michael Kay QC at Luton Crown Court. Visiting Bedford Boys' School and dining with magistrates afforded



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Enjoying tea with pupils at the hearing impaired unit at Icknield Primary School.

me useful contacts. I enjoyed going to The Alban Neve Deaf Centre, where I could converse in 'sign' because of deafness in my own family. Lyn and I attended the Consecration of the Venerable Richard Atkinson OBE as Bishop of Bedford in St Paul's Cathedral.

Mayor-making ceremonies gave us an insight into local government, and proved helpful in many later visits, where I found mayors, councillors and officers supporting the many charities

that do so much in Bedfordshire. Real highlights were Her Majesty's Garden Party and, at the other extreme, viewing the Emmaus Homeless Project in the north of the county, where Terry Waite was the principal guest.

Bedford Borough Armed Forces' Day, Flag-Raising and Covenant-Signing was very moving, as was evensong followed by a dinner for High Sheriffs given by the Inner Temple. I witnessed the Olympic Torch passing through Dunstable, and other events included the Vice-Chancellor of Bedfordshire University's retirement party; a concert at St Mary's Church, Luton; the University's graduation ceremony; the Bedford River Festival; the LAMP (services for the homeless) golf day; and the Burma Star Association laying up their standard at St Peter de Merton Church, Bedford.

We toured police headquarters at Kempston with new Chief Constable to view his firearms service. Luton and Bedford Police Cadets' passing-out parade and a Crimebeat reception briefed us on the work of policing a diverse community. Citizenship award ceremonies every two weeks gave me further insights into the richness and diversity of our growing community.



Planting a tree with Shefford town mayor and councillors to commemorate my year in office and the Diamond Jubilee.



News from and about Members

My own talk, 'Homeless to High Sheriff', brought me back to earth, especially when visiting the Salvation Army, and spending part of a night on the streets with the homeless.

Some 435 guests attended my Judges' Service at St Mary's Church, Luton, a wonderful event where my Chaplain, the Revd Canon Nick Bell, delivered a very powerful sermon. The Luton Youth Brass Ensemble played a trumpet fanfare composed for the occasion, ably supported by the Luton Cantores Choir.

The last six months have raced by as busy as ever. Highlights have been planting 25 trees in various locations throughout the county, serving Christmas dinner to the homeless at Noah Enterprise, conversing with children in the hearing-impaired unit at Icknield Primary School (all pictured), and attending the fête at Wootton Lower School. As the end of my Shrievalty drew near, I was glad to bring together the magistrates from the benches at Bedford and Luton at a reception at Keech Hospice Care. Just a few days later, I was honoured to be received by the Judges at the Crown Court, who paid me a touching and gratifying tribute.



Serving lunch to the homeless on Christmas Day at Noah Enterprise.

Can I say that I have achieved the goals I set for myself? Without neglecting the rest of Bedfordshire, I do believe I have raised the profile of Luton and South Bedfordshire by holding many official events in this part of the county. Having spent most of my life here, I know this to be a decent place in which to live and to work and hope I have persuaded a few others of that fact.

Lyn and I have enjoyed my shrieval year immensely. It has been an exhausting schedule but, in equal measure, the journey has been a most enlightening and heart-warming one. I will treasure the experiences I have had, and the friendships I have made, for the rest of my days. □

J Sapsworth Esq MBE
High Sheriff of Bedfordshire 2012-13