

BERKSHIRE

News from and about members



Above: With the Town Crier of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead at my garden party

DOES EVERY High Sheriff in nomination go through the same cycle of emotion? After the initial amazement at being asked, there is the anxiety of wanting to do well, mounting apprehension with each year in waiting, and then a gradual acceptance which gives way to a deep sense of pride and pleasure in being able to serve in the role. Now, almost halfway through the year, the reassurances of my predecessors that it would be tremendously satisfying and enjoyable have happily been confirmed.

Another bit of initial advice was to 'Walk slowly, and always carry a speech in your back pocket'. After a couple of fittings at the tailor, and my first introduction to the wearing of tights, I realised that court dress imposes its own stately pace and that there is no back pocket!

What have I learnt in the last six months? First, that each county has its own special character. In our Royal County of Berkshire, there is the honour of being involved not only in royal visits, but also in

my first week, in the state visit of His Excellency the President of the Republic of Ireland and Mrs Higgins. Being in the centre of the royal pageantry with The Sovereign is an unforgettable experience.

Then, the traditional emphasis on looking after the judiciary has become less formal, and judges make charming guests and excellent company. The High Sheriff is welcome in the courts, where magistrates made me aware of local issues and concerns, which could be passed on discreetly. In Berkshire, the Citizenship Foundation/Magistrates' Association Mock Trial Competition for schools is hotly contested, introducing schoolchildren to the criminal justice system and the workings of the courts. As patron of the Mock Trials, I found that it grabbed attention when, despite being formally dressed, I put on a ten-gallon hat and waved a plastic six-shooter (which had passed court security), asking the assembled youngsters what they thought of when hearing the title 'Sheriff'!

The range of activities so far this year has included meeting Her Majesty The Queen at the opening of the new Reading station; attending school fetes, prize-givings and regional debating contests; spending time with large and small charities; visiting our Youth Offending Team and Approved Premises, and joining 2,500 girls at the Brownie Big 100 Birthday. When visiting our Community Foundation, I learnt that only one-tenth of charitable donations raised each year stays in the county. So I have adopted the theme 'Harmony, Healing and Hope' to attract support for a wide range of need in the county. The High Sheriff's 'Bravo Berkshire' concert was held as part of the Windsor Festival, showcasing Berkshire talent, and was kindly hosted by Sir Terry Wogan. In prospect is the High Sheriff's Schools Cookbook, to feature young chefs and publicise their schools.

I have learnt not to be shy about wearing the uniform, which creates instant rapport and gives a conversational entrée. At the garden party Chris Brown, Town Crier of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Town, gladly posed with me. The party opened the way to community engagement in a personal and unexpected manner. One of our guests, a chartered surveyor, raised the alarm about the perilous state of our roof – we now have scaffolding up, and major works are proceeding!

I am enjoying working with the High Sheriffs of Buckinghamshire, Joe Barclay, and of Oxfordshire, Tony Stratton. We have shared joint visits to the Police and Crime Commissioner, and to the Chief Constable, during which we spent time with an armed response team who proudly showed us their hardware.

Finally, I must acknowledge the dedicated service of our Lord-Lieutenant, the Hon Mrs Bayliss JP, who retires in January. My predecessors and I are grateful for her wonderful help, support and advice.

♣ **Christopher Khoo**
High Sheriff of Berkshire 2014-15



Joe Barclay (High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire), Di Stratton and Tony Stratton (High Sheriff of Oxfordshire) and Chris Khoo at the Thames Valley Police Headquarters