



# Representing the royal county in a royal year

AT THE training day at Burghley House I learnt the central truth of being High Sheriff: to put a close connection with the courts and the police at the heart of your year. The link of the High Sheriff with the judges and magistrates, the police and other public services gives a central meaning to the role. From that central strand, individual High Sheriffs may choose to concentrate on particular aspects of the judicial system.

I have taken a particular interest in those areas that deal with the fall-out on families from the criminal justice system. The Troubled Families Programme, which seeks to break the cycle of offending and help those families most at risk, is doing good work across the county. Youth offending teams, probation services and the many charities working to help vulnerable people and to keep young people out of the courts, all benefit from the High Sheriff taking an interest. The Elizabeth Fry Hostel for Women on Licence in Reading is one of only six approved premises for women in England: an essential charity working alongside the public services. I have lived in the Royal County of Berkshire for all my adult life but there is nothing like being High Sheriff to discover quite how much more there is going on than one could ever imagine.

My regional grouping of High Sheriffs is small compared to others. We consist of the three counties which make up the Thames Valley: Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. Together with my two fellow High Sheriffs, Milly Soames in Buckinghamshire and Sarah Taylor in Oxfordshire, we gave a lunch in early July to support a charity which works across the region. The Thames Valley Partnership was founded by Lady Popplewell, High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire in 1992-93, and it covers five areas: restorative justice; 'New Leaf

which helps ex-offenders into work; the provision of family desks at the Crown Courts to help the families of recently convicted offenders; using art to work with women offenders and a telephone service supported by Vodafone for the victims of domestic abuse. We were pleased to raise awareness of this wonderful charity which has resulted in publicity and donations.

Here in Berkshire there is one indisputable fact: we are a royal county. And the royal status of the county reached a pinnacle in April, only two weeks after my Declaration at Reading Crown Court, when HM The Queen celebrated her 90th birthday in Windsor. As we go about our daily shrieval tasks, I can only marvel at the strength of character, duty and personality that is Her Majesty at the age of 90. Having already been to the Post Office, The Queen opened the Edwardian bandstand in Alexandra Gardens where I was presented. Her Majesty did a walkabout with HRH The Duke of Edinburgh through the streets of Windsor and, before her family birthday dinner, she lit a Beacon at the top of the Long Walk, the first of many across the country.



**Top:** Opening of Little Owl Pre-school, Reading, with the Mayor of Reading and Rob Wilson, MP for Reading East (Photography by Clare Beckett)

**Above:** With the Constable and Governor of Windsor Castle, Admiral Sir James Perowne, KBE and the Chairman of the Submariners Association, Mr Jim McMaster unveiling a plaque to Lieutenant Commander Geoffrey Saxton White, Royal Navy, posthumously awarded the VC for his selfless actions while commanding HM Submarine E.14 in the Dardanelles on 21 January 1918

Curtseying to Her Majesty and seeing her wonderful smile as I was presented yet again, made me very proud to be The Queen's representative in matters relating to law and order in Berkshire.

### ◆ Victoria Fishburn

*High Sheriff of Berkshire 2016-17*



**Above:** With the Chief Fire Officer, Andy Fry, the Chairman of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority, Colin Dudley, and Lord-Lieutenant of Berkshire, James Puxley