



Cumbria 2013-14

My year began on a predictable path but other avenues soon opened up, especially as I endeavoured to ensure an outcome from each visit I made.

I had worked on getting to know the 'chain gang', attending their civic services, receptions and dinners. Latterly, I invited them to a Saturday lunch party at home. To my amazement 40 accepted the invitation, including spouses, and they enthusiastically exchanged ideas and experiences. In Cumbria, it is apparently unusual for them to get together informally. Certainly the array of gold chains was a wondrous sight.

This led to my being asked to address the Cumbria County Council in full session, the first time a High Sheriff has been asked to do this in Cumbria. The floor was mine and I was able to point to synergies between the High Sheriff's role and the public service councillors fulfil. My theme, on how to educate craftsmen, linked in well with the Council's current programme of apprenticeship schemes and gave them welcome publicity for their initiatives.



Installation of new High Sheriff of Cumbria.

Left to right: Marcia Reid Fotheringham JP, Claire Hensman (Lord-Lieutenant and High Sheriff 2007), new High Sheriff Martyn Hart, His Honour Judge Paul Batty (Honorary Recorder of Carlisle), Diana Matthews JP and the Venerable Dr Richard Pratt (Chaplain to Martyn Hart).

Soon after, I became aware of the dietary problems in our county and I met a professor of physiology, acting as a European 'assessor' on obesity. He asked whether I could get him a similar

audience. With the co-operation of the Chairman of the County Council, we set up a series of meetings to tackle the problem and to secure major European funding. These links have opened up another initiative. The former Windermere Magistrates' Court has lain empty for 14 years, and, following consultations with the Chairman of the County Council, a way is being found to create a much needed community facility.



The Big Sleep: The High Sheriff braves the elements.

Visits across the county have varied from going out at night on the Barrow lifeboat to being out with the Army Cadets on an isolated moor. When I visited the Ulverston Lifeboat Station in the autumn, I learned that 70 per cent of the Morecambe Bay rescues are carried out after dark and they needed infrared search equipment. I contacted a local business which supplies infrared equipment to NATO and the need is being met. Another visit involved shooting at targets with a delightful group of Muslim youth being trained against following a Jihad lifestyle. The



News from and about Members

genius of the programme is that it focuses on the cultural and historical connections that have existed between ethnic groups under the British Empire and the Commonwealth, notably through shared service during the World Wars. Such awareness gives a common pride and purpose that transcends passing animosities between groups, thus facilitating dialogue and mutual understanding. At the same time, the proper handling of guns instils respect for how dangerous they are.

Other visits have been arranged through the Cumbria Community Foundation under the chairmanship of

James Carr (High Sheriff of Cumbria in 2010). 'The Big Sleep' was held above Windermere, overlooking snow-capped hills, in aid of the Winter Warmth Fund to help tackle fuel poverty. Of the 165 participants, most succumbed to using tents but a handful, including the High Sheriff, slept without tents, not under the stars as planned, but rather in the wind and the rain. Publicity flowed and the project raised over £80k. The final flourish has been a Grand Charity Dinner with over 300 attending. This has been a joint venture organised with my successor to start his shrieval year. An auction helped to raise a considerable sum for the Cumbria

Community Foundation's High Sheriff's Crimebeat Fund.

My favourite moment? High on the list must be when I presented a High Sheriff's shield to a group of special needs adults, who forgot their disabilities and played and sang their hearts out in perfect harmony. Top of their bill was their specially selected song, 'I shot the Sheriff'; a hint maybe that it was time for me to let my worthy successor take over! □

Diana Matthews JP

High Sheriff of Cumbria 2013-14