



Fun, fortitude and fortune

AS A retired Royal Air Force chaplain, I had assumed that I had encountered most of the challenging situations that came a clergyman's way. However, as I asked my interviewee if I could assist in any way – imagining they wanted me to arrange a service for the work of the High Sheriff – I was stunned to be asked if I would be prepared to be High Sheriff! Recovering somewhat, I imagined that I would find it impossible as a Church of England cleric to gain my Diocesan Bishop's approval.

I was mistaken; the regulations had recently been clarified and the Bishop was delighted to agree and so I find myself to be the High Sheriff of Cumbria and still the Rector of Egremont.

The fun arrived almost immediately. I was invited to the Roman Games on the Ewanrigg estate in Maryport. Rome had established a garrison in Maryport and a hard-pressed community centre used this to inspire their young people to produce cardboard chariots, armour, run gladiatorial races, create a triumphal arch and produce a mural. A tough estate, but



a dedicated team of pensioners wanted to enthuse their young families and had offered inspired leadership to produce a local festival. The theme of local inspiration and local leadership providing support and fun has been a feature of many events that I have attended.

The No Wood Low Wood rafting event revisited the use of cardboard in the improbable setting of Windermere. All the rafts sank but considerable charitable funds were raised. Many more events, filled with hours of energetic fundraising in response to recognised hardships, were determined to raise spirits and funds. Jigsaw, the children's section of our Carlisle hospice, generated funds in the grounds of Muncaster Castle and everyone disappeared in clouds of coloured cornflower.

Brownies, beavers, guides and scouts all greeted the joys of scouting and guiding with enthusiasm even in the downpours that Cumbria calls springtime. I met sea cadets climbing hills to light beacons, army cadets deploying on exercise and air cadets parading with panache; again, young people supported by inspired leaders making a difference.

Fortitude was a recurring feature on many visits in Cumbria. The flooding has subsided but in so many homes damage is not repaired and while many

Left: With Sergeant Emma Clark at the Air Training Corps stand at Grasmere Show
Below left: At a Cumbria County Council charity event in support of SSAFA
Below: At Bookwell School assembly



Above: At Ewanrigg Roman day

people are still rebuilding their houses they cannot fully repair their fears of another such event. I was privileged and humbled to meet so many resolute flood victims and most supportive volunteer individuals and organisations.

I was also privileged to observe the professional fortitude of the judges and magistrates of my county, who face an ever-increasing workload of demanding legal work and yet respond with enthusiasm, integrity and wisdom. A necessarily brief visit to the courts left me with an abiding admiration for their professionalism. So also for the police and other blue light services that face duty and danger with fortitude.

Finally, to reflect on my own good fortune... When slipping on wet ground, wearing new court shoes hurrying to Carlisle Cathedral, I turned a complete somersault in full court dress. Fortunate, as no one observed my acrobatics and I did not fall on my sword! Napoleon indicated that he wanted lucky generals not clever ones.

May I wish my colleagues continued similar good fortune.

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