



Savouring every moment

NOW THAT my shrieval year is over, many people say to me, 'Didn't your year go quickly?' I completely disagree! Instead, the constant flow of new experiences, of making new friends and of going to new places, made me feel that I was for ever setting out on a new adventure. It is a rare privilege to be High Sheriff and I never anticipated that the experience would be so far-reaching and so fulfilling. And, despite calling Derbyshire 'home' all my life, I found that there was much more for me to discover in the county than I had ever known about previously.

My wife Fiona and I embraced the traditional role of overseeing the welfare of judges in the county. Derbyshire has no High Court and I was advised not to expect any 'Red Judges' to visit; but this was incorrect! We were delighted that two passed through and hosting them at

Below: Before the legal service with the Queen's Remembrancer Senior Master Fontaine, Hon Mrs Justice Andrews, Chief Constable, Bishop Humphrey Southern, neighbouring High Sheriffs, the Coroner and Circuit and District Judges



dinner was a delight. Otherwise, visits to the Crown Court, to Magistrates and to the Coroner were all regular events and we were bowled over by the kind reception that we always received.

Links to law and order meant that I was invited to be a regular visitor to the constabulary, both at headquarters and also to the divisions. I was pleased to present bravery and achievement awards at four different ceremonies, and otherwise I spent time with personnel in public protection, dogs, drugs, forensics and the 999 room. For someone who had not known the police before, it was inspiring to see what happens in the county to keep us all safe, as well as bringing the perpetrators of crime to justice.

Visits to charities always made an impression on me, reminding me that some people's lives are not always as fortunate as others', their troubles often precipitated through no fault of their own. Mostly I was impressed by the smaller charities, driven to success through the selfless commitment of volunteers determined to do their best.

During the year I attended many concerts, ceremonies and pageants. The most significant of these was our Legal Service at Derby Cathedral. We hosted a lunch before it at the Art Gallery which is packed with incredible Joseph Wright paintings – it was a wonderful day shared with many judges, county and civic leaders, and neighbouring High Sheriffs.

I enjoyed acting as returning officer on election night. The count was painstakingly



Above: On stage at Buxton Opera House after *The Pirates of Penzance*, with Dianne Jeffrey Chairman of Age UK and the Duke of Devonshire Patron of Foundation Derbyshire

thorough and I declared the eventual result at 6.45 am. I have maintained contact with both the victor Patrick McLoughlin MP and the runner-up Cllr Andy Botham, whose regular employment is as a train driver for East Midlands Trains. This had a happy conclusion for me because Cllr Botham undertook to take us in his cab all the way to London in January – you will be reassured to know that I never touched any of the controls!

I am often asked what the highlight of my year was. Undoubtedly a unique moment was in October when I hosted a one-off performance of *The Pirates of Penzance* performed by the Derby Gilbert & Sullivan Company at beautiful Buxton Opera House, raising funds through the ticket sales for Age UK and for the community foundation, Foundation Derbyshire. Friends, colleagues and acquaintances from all over the county rallied to the cause, and many local companies helped even further by advertising in the programme. The show was a complete sell-out and we raised an astonishing £30,000. Some of the proceeds have already been distributed to deserving causes in Derbyshire through Foundation Derbyshire of which I am a trustee.

This has been a brilliant year and I could not be more grateful for the opportunity of being Derbyshire's High Sheriff. It did not go quickly at all. Perhaps it is about savouring every moment?

◆ Oliver Stephenson
High Sheriff of Derbyshire 2015-16