



Action-packed

WHAT AN enormous privilege and honour this year has been, meeting so many people around the county doing extraordinary things for their communities, and linking organisations together for their mutual benefit.

I followed four distinguished men in the role and felt like a pioneer... the usual opening remark was... 'Oh a Lady High Sheriff, and where is your sword?' I have sat on the bench and protected (with little more than a handbag) High Court Judges on ten occasions.

It was an honour giving out seven Court Awards with High Sheriff's certificates to some brave individuals and visiting Dartmoor prison was an eye-opener. Work there includes books being translated into Braille, and a working call centre. All three prisons in Devon face huge challenges, namely smuggled mobile phones, drugs and hooch as well as staff shortages. Drones which had delivered drugs – including 'Spice' to individual cells – are now blocked over Dartmoor, but at Channings Wood drugs come in sprayed or soaked on books.

I was lucky enough to be present at a monthly independent prisoner review where the judge took six hours to process 42 inmates' sentences. I learnt that hooch is made on the cell radiators and takes four days to mature.

It was a privilege to visit many police departments. I even took my police cadet to the seventh week of the officers' firearms training, where a mock criminal was extracted from a car and placed face down in seconds. We both tried out the G36 rifle on the range and thankfully hit the target!

Supporting the emergency services, I joined the local resilience practice 'Exercise Night Hawk' at Exeter Airport which involved all the emergency services, airport staff and a crashed aircraft, and included removing the injured passengers, who were willing college students complete with fake blood.

The Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service invited me to ascend their one-hundred-foot platform in preparation for their crew's help with

Below: With recipients of Devon Community Awards





News from and about members

Right: On the Dutch naval frigate *Evertsen* with my Police Cadet Oliver Priestly, far left

Centre: With Margaret Thomas at the Community Awards at Compton Castle

Bottom: Abseiling down Compton Castle with the help of local firefighters



my charity abseil down the front of our home, Compton Castle. It was also fascinating joining an ambulance crew for an 11-hour shift; this involved white-knuckle rides all day and incidents including a passenger who had fallen onto a steam train track – complete with steam train.

In supporting young people, the Devon ACF training camp supplied much-needed ear plugs for a mock capture of a pilot, and in North Devon the Sea Cadets cooked a Trafalgar Night black tie dinner for 70 as part of their training. Third-year university students were on interesting work experience at Paignton Zoo and one was testing octopi's memory with locked feeding tubes!

I found the Ten Tors inspirational and humbling – this takes place on Dartmoor and incorporates both the Ten Tors Challenge and the Jubilee Challenge, the latter specifically for young people with special needs, both physical and educational. I joined a few others in a Merlin helicopter and we landed twice in a gale to encourage volunteers manning the checkpoints.

Another highlight was handing out 10 High Sheriff's Community Awards to unsung volunteer heroes I had met from all round the county. I had a memorable experience standing among 24 Tomahawk cruise missiles on a Royal Navy nuclear submarine and later went on a seven-hour trip to sea with the Dutch Navy as part of weekly NATO training exercises.

This has been a totally unforgettable and privileged year.

◆ Angela Gilbert

High Sheriff of Devon 2016-17