



Ladies day in Devon

ON MAUNDY Thursday, 13 April it was a great privilege to hold my Declaration in our home, Lee Ford. All my family were present as were the Lord-Lieutenant and Vice Lord-Lieutenant. I invited the eight living past lady High Sheriffs of Devon and they all attended. This was an historic first.

My engagements began quickly. An amazing visit to Ten Tors to watch the 2,400 young individuals begin their trek over Dartmoor and to meet some of the hundreds of volunteers who support them. Colonel James Coote DSO OBE was my host. The snap election announced by the Prime Minister created an unexpected highlight, since I presided as returning officer for the East Devon constituency. It was fascinating to spend a long night watching a flawless count and verification process. There were Commonwealth observers present learning how to manage the count in our democratic way. After two hours' sleep I attended the King's Squad passing out, inspection and drill display at Commando Training Centre Royal Marines, Lympstone. My host was the Commandant, Colonel Mike Tanner OBE. What a privilege to watch the young men



who had trained so hard being presented with their Green Berets and troop awards, and later to meet their families.

In May HRH the Countess of Wessex, as our President, attended the three-day Devon County Show, with which I am heavily involved as a chief steward and member of its Council. I wore two hats that day and changed outfit four times depending on my duties. Was I the High Sheriff of Devon or a hard-working chief steward?

I was keen to take advantage of High Sheriffs being allowed special access to the prison system and observe prison life. To date I have visited HMP Exeter and HMP Dartmoor. Each is completely different. Exeter is a remand prison in the centre of the city, facing problems with drones delivering drugs, attempted escapes and overcrowding. Dartmoor, for long-term prisoners, is in a remote and sometimes harsh environment. Neither prison was

what I expected and it opened my eyes to the skill and dedication of governors and prison officers and the problems they face, while providing encouragement and creating environments which build self-esteem with the aim of reducing re-offending. Dartmoor particularly concentrates on skills training to encourage future employment for those who are nearing release. The prison has a warm atmosphere, beautiful gardens and a very positive feel. The recent no-smoking policy within prisons has created additional aggravations causing much unrest and ill-temper among offenders.

Magistrates are one of the most under-recognised groups of volunteers. Sadly the Ministry of Justice cuts have caused many Magistrates' Courts to close. I attended a tea party marking the closure of Torquay Magistrates' Court. Was this a celebration or a commiseration? Over 100 magistrates attended and many amusing anecdotes were recounted. Morale has been low, but they seemed more positive about the future, despite the lack of funding causing uncertainty.

As I enter the second half of my year I am aware I need to be proactive on my visits to voluntary organisations and to be more focused on meeting the volunteers, whose energy and engagement with those less fortunate can make such a difference to their lives and families. Being High Sheriff can open doors that are otherwise not available. My advice to future High Sheriffs is very much to make the most of it and don't be afraid to ask to do something that is of particular interest to you.

◆ Heleen Lindsay-Fynn
High Sheriff of Devon 2017-18



Above: David Fursdon, Lord-Lieutenant of Devon, and shrieval ladies

Left: At the start of Ten Tors

Below left: Legal Sunday – with Lord Mayor's Sergeants-at-Mace

Below right: Exmouth sea cadets open day

