



Try it – you might even enjoy it!

I WRITE this as I approach the halfway mark of my time as High Sheriff of Dorset. Much of what I have seen and done so far has been new territory for me but no less interesting or enjoyable for it. If you catch yourself saying ‘I’m not sure this is really my thing...’ I would urge you to overcome that diffidence, and go anyway. It’s unlikely that you will be disappointed. I have found it helpful to remember that a key objective of the role is *to take an interest and offer encouragement wherever it’s needed*. Being non-political means that for once one can, and indeed should, avoid taking sides. I find it liberating just to listen – with no executive responsibility.

Having been a magistrate since the ‘80s, I have long been interested in Domestic Abuse as a crime – one which is difficult to prosecute, defend, sentence appropriately and enforce. Since December 2015, Controlling and Coercive Behaviour too has become a crime, and I set myself the task of seeing if I could in some way raise awareness, and thus reduce the occurrence, of cases of this sort. I approached Dorset Police and Bournemouth University’s Digital Animation Faculty (widely regarded as the best in the country) to see if they could collaborate in the making of a short (and punchy) public awareness film to be shown and discussed at the High Sheriff’s Legal Lecture in March ’18. The Duchess of Cornwall is interested in the subject (and is a supporter of Refuge) and has agreed to attend, subject to dates. So far the project has received overwhelming support.

Meanwhile, although I have seen plenty of CCTV footage in court, I have often wanted to have a better insight into how the police go about ‘managing’ the excesses of the night-time economy, and to witness it first-hand – particularly in Bournemouth and Weymouth. The police were extremely helpful and accommodating and let me choose two summer weekend night shifts, which I



assumed would be lively, for me to go out with them. I stayed with the response team until the small hours to get the full flavour and I wasn’t disappointed. I witnessed, close up, a catalogue of offences including assaults, thefts, public order misdemeanours and so on, not to mention a clash between rival stag parties (from Swindon). The police were outstanding and I was able to tell them so. They were very pleased.

Finally I – we – have much enjoyed the set pieces, slightly to my surprise. Anyone who has organised a family wedding will recognise the similarities: the guest list (with its not always easy demands), the venue, the invitations, the seating; the less glamorous parking and lavatories; *the speech*, the music, the flowers; *the food and drink!* As with that family wedding, my advice would be to plan well ahead, set a budget (and stick to it), and remember to enjoy it – and don’t forget to dance with the bridegroom’s mother.

♣ **John Young MC JP DL**
High Sheriff of Dorset 2017-18



Top: At my Declaration at the Corn Exchange, Blandford, with my predecessor Sir Philip Williams Bt (seated), my chaplain the Revd Canon Charles Mitchell-Innes, Under Sheriff Katharine Jones and Louise Dutton JP (far left)

Above: Presenting a long-service medal to PC Andrew Robertson