



A revealing first six months



AS I approach the halfway mark of my shrieval year, I have been kindly invited to write a piece for *The High Sheriff*, describing my experiences so far.

I'm delighted to do so, but studying the schedule for the last six months, I do ask myself how on earth I can describe the role effectively, without hogging the majority of the magazine's pages to myself? It has been nothing short of a revelation and I hope that within the next few paragraphs, I am able to do my county justice.

My declaration was on 17 April within the stunning surroundings of Gloucester Cathedral. It was, still to my slight surprise, witnessed by approximately 900 people – family and friends were a given, but the wide range of the county's great and good was a terrifying prospect, along with a large smattering of casual bystanders coming along to see the show.

It happily proceeded smoothly and the baton of office of the High Sheriff of Gloucestershire was passed into my (slightly trembling) hands by Roger Head OBE, who fulfilled his year with such style and aplomb.

Above: Mr John Beard, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, and Mr Stewart Edgar, Chief Fire Officer, Gloucestershire Fire & Rescue Service with Countess Bathurst

Since then I have travelled the length and breadth of my county – there have been schools, youth venues, town visits and tours, mosques, wonderful shifts spent with the police across our boundaries, concerts given by young people with special needs, learning about the work of the fire service, and attending courts and judges of all levels, as well as several royal visits within Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire.

The highlights have been many – so many I cannot possibly include them all, but I will mention a few. I've had a pie named after me (it IS delicious); I've had a fire engine named after me, too (I love the thought of a fire engine dashing around Cirencester doing valiant things, with my name on it); I've spent hours with engaging and intelligent and dynamic school students; and I've opened some wonderful fetes and met some extraordinary people across the charity sector.

I'm incredibly proud that the book club I promised to start continues to

operate at HMP Eastwood Park for women, stretching the minds and horizons of the prisoners who join it. A new branch of the Women's Institute has opened in the same facility, giving prisoners a sense of belonging, and I hope, something they will be able to take with them into their lives once they rejoin society.

As I'm sure many High Sheriffs have experienced, the one question I am asked the most is: 'What does a High Sheriff DO?' There is no real answer. Each individual uses the year to place their own style on the time in office, but there is one underlying thread to which I suspect every High Sheriff would attest.

It is a revelation – the plethora of people one meets, the extraordinary things they do, the inspiration which may be drawn, and the realisation that, without a doubt, we would not exist as a society if it were not for the people who work so hard, give so much of their time, voluntarily, to better the lives of others – and it is those people for whom I have endless admiration and I am truly grateful for the opportunity to have met them.

◆◆ The Countess Bathurst *High Sheriff of Gloucestershire 2016-17*



Above: Earl and Countess Bathurst after her Declaration Service at Gloucester Cathedral on 17 April