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Greater access...

Above: Paul Lee with Greater Manchester Civic Heads attending the Mayor of Wigan's Charity Ball at Haigh Hall on 20 March 2015

MY YEAR as High Sheriff has flown by, and I have enjoyed every minute of it.

It has been an immense honour for me to join with the Lord-Lieutenant in welcoming royal visitors to our county. The opportunity to entertain Her Majesty's High Court Judges in Manchester has been another delight, through which I have sought to highlight the vibrant educational and cultural aspects of Greater Manchester which may not always be so apparent to busy visitors.

Greater Manchester comprises 10 boroughs. A significant part of the role, therefore, is to be with the mayors at some of their own ceremonial occasions, and that has been great fun.

The law has many facets, and a particular focus for the High Sheriff is the courts, a world largely unknown to me, having spent just over 40 years as a corporate lawyer. Therefore, the opportunity to attend Crown Court, sit with the judges – and indeed dine with them very regularly – has been particularly interesting.

In 2014, the centenary of the outbreak of World War One was marked throughout the county with many services of commemoration. There were large, formal services in cathedrals but among the more poignant and personal, perhaps, was the unveiling in Royton Park in Oldham of a commemorative paving stone to mark the award of the Victoria Cross to Sgt John Hogan.

I also wished to understand more about the



News from and about members

public and voluntary sectors during the course of my year. I have been fortunate in spending some time with the police (including a night shift), the fire service and the probation and prison services.

In Greater Manchester the work done to support the homeless, addicts and the unemployed is hugely impressive. I have seen for myself the outstanding work done by such charities as the Booth Centre, the Message Trust, RECLAIM and others.

I chose to support one charity in particular, Access Sport, during my year as High Sheriff. The charity aims to give more children, especially those in disadvantaged areas, access to a wide range of quality local sport. Access Sport will now be able to create 15 new or enhanced, volunteer led, sustainable community sport clubs. This includes working with the fire service and the police to extend some of the facilities they already operate, such as Moss Side Boxing Club at Moss Side Fire Station.

I am a committed believer in interfaith co-operation and the strengthening of dialogue among people of different religions and people of no religion. It has therefore been a great honour to be High Sheriff of Greater Manchester which is a wonderfully diverse county, with all races, cultures and religions making a huge contribution to its community. My visits to various synagogues, mosques, Christian churches and cathedrals and other places of worship have all underlined for me the very real benefit of dialogue, and the understanding and tolerance which can result from that.

It has been a varied year, allowing me to experience many facets of life in Greater

Manchester of which I was previously less well informed. I will take with me from my year a determination to continue to encourage social cohesion, racial and religious tolerance and co-operation, and support for related charities. It has truly been a wonderful year for me.

♣ Paul Lee

High Sheriff of Greater Manchester 2014-15

Below: The High Sheriff flanked by Nigel Travis (left) and Mike Dillon, Moss Side Boxing Club and, below, members of the Club



Left to right: George Almond CBE DL, Sheriff Dana Lawthorne and Under Sheriff Tim Gleeson

Shot with the (US) Sheriffs

The immediate past High Sheriff of Greater Manchester, George Almond, met a real Sheriff and his Under Sheriff at a recent 9/11 memorial event in the City of Alexandria, Virginia USA, when they took the opportunity to discuss their respective roles.

Mr Almond said he 'learnt that their Sheriff's Office is not dissimilar to that of our High Sheriffs' of old, inasmuch as they are responsible for the operation of the Detention Centre, courthouse, service of legal documents, execution of court orders, transportation of prisoners and execution of arrest warrants together with general law enforcement.'