



Snug as a bug

THE SECOND half of my year proved every bit as enjoyable as the first. As well as my own Judges' Service I also attended services in Lancashire, Merseyside and Cheshire, each slightly different but all very impressive.

I held an inaugural golf day in aid of my Police Trust Fund on a glorious October day, attracting the maximum number of teams. With my husband Grahame I enjoyed the dinner afterwards and presented prizes with Sir Peter Fahy, then the Chief Constable.

I have attended several Greater Manchester Police events including passing out parades for Police Cadets, a conference celebrating 100 years of women in policing, a visit to the fascinating Police Museum, a day with the Mounted Police and Dog Unit and a Christmas concert where we were fabulously entertained by the wonderful GMP Band.

To celebrate International Women's Day I cruised around Salford Quays

aboard the *Emmeline Pankhurst*. After lunch I spoke about the improvements in women's equality since I started my career in the late 1960s. Still on a nautical theme I was delighted to name and launch a specially built sailing dinghy bought with funds raised by Rochdale East Rotary Club. The *Gracie* has been adapted for use by disabled sailors and will be used by over 1,000 people.

I attended the passing out parade for 22 newly qualified firefighters, the first for nearly eight years in Greater Manchester. Family, friends and guests were given demonstrations by the trainees, which included the use of a Cold Cut Systems ultra-high pressure lance that rapidly reduces the temperature of a fire to ensure conditions are cooler for firefighters who have to enter the blaze. Tactical ventilation is then used to remove fire gasses and smoke thus allowing the crew to rescue casualties faster than traditional techniques. Greater Manchester is the first Fire and Rescue Service in the country

to have this equipment on all its fire appliances.

Grahame and I were honoured to attend the 75th Anniversary of the 1st Polish Independent Parachute Brigade and were greeted by the Consul General of the Republic of Poland, Lukasz Lutostanski. We were delighted to chat with a small number of veterans from that brigade – all of them now in their nineties – before unveiling a plaque to commemorate Major General Stanislaw Franciszek Sosabowski CBE who during the Second World War displayed great bravery and outstanding leadership skills. In 1941 he formed and led the 1st Polish Parachute Brigade which fought with distinction during Operation Market Garden in September 1944 and earned great respect from comrades in the British airborne forces.

Perhaps the most extraordinary event I took part in was the 'Manchester Sleepout', an event organised by the Booth Centre in November to raise awareness of the great difficulties facing homeless people. At 9.00 pm all those taking part went into the grounds of Manchester Cathedral to find a spot for the night. Together with the Mayor of Trafford we found some space and started to make ourselves as comfortable as possible. It was a lovely mild night until 4.00 am when the heavens opened and it continued to rain heavily for the rest of the Sleepout. Fortunately, I had a waterproof survival bag so was snug enough until I sat up and then got quite damp round the edges when rainwater flowed into my sleeping bag! I remained outside until 5.30 am when the urge for a hot drink got the better of me.

The Sleepout doesn't pretend to be an experience of what it's really like to be homeless, but what it does do is raise awareness of the issues faced by homeless people night after night. I am delighted to report that the event raised over £55,000.

◆ Sharman Birtles JP DL
High Sheriff of Greater Manchester 2015-16

Clockwise from below: The High Sheriff with some of the Polish veterans. Preparing to settle down for the night! The winning team with the High Sheriff and Sir Peter Fahy.



Photo courtesy of Chris Oldham GMP