



Above: Sharing in the diversity of Adam Day

County's generosity rewarded

IN THE past few months I have attended a great number of events and they have ranged from the sublime to the, well... sublime!

Following my Declaration my husband Grahame and I were off to a flying start with a visit from HRH The Princess Royal within the first week.

I have attended a wide range of events from the most moving services such as the centenary of the Gallipoli Landings with the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers (Lancashire) in Bury and the VE Day Anniversary Service in Tameside, to the lighter hearted occasions such as the Yanks Parade in Uppermill and the Big Curry Cook Off in Manchester.

I have enjoyed entertaining the mayors from all ten Greater Manchester Boroughs, as well as ten High Court Judges. I have been to graduation ceremonies, visited prisons, attended several civic occasions and citizenship ceremonies, witnessed the swearing in of 30 new magistrates and visited all statutory services including an emergency services open day, as well as many charities and voluntary organisations, all doing brilliant work.

I've mixed with some outstanding young people, including visits to the Sea Cadets and a Jamboree held by GM West Scout Council. I had reasonable success at tomahawk throwing and 'soft' archery (using arrows with suckers rather than sharp points!) unlike when I fired a rifle at the Army Cadets range. All the young people I've met are a breath of fresh air, confident and articulate.

The most poignant ceremony I attended was the unveiling of the Gallipoli Stone in Rochdale. Also at the ceremony was Major Edmund Gartside, High Sheriff of Greater Manchester in 1995/1996, who unveiled the Stone after the Lord-Lieutenant spoke movingly about the contributions Major Gartside and his father had made to the Lancashire Fusiliers.

Following the precision of the parade, led by



the King's Division Band, it was a totally different atmosphere at Adam Day in Manchester. The purpose of Adam Day is to remind mankind that every human being of whatever faith or none is an Adamite – a son or daughter of Adam and Eve. They promote peace, harmony and love and want to rid the world of hatred and prejudice. The occasion was hugely enjoyable, if slightly chaotic.

Another novel experience was a visit to the new set of Coronation Street where, with my Under Sheriff David Cam, we met some cast members and were let into a number of 'behind-the-scenes' confidences. Of course we've been sworn to secrecy but I can tell you that I now watch the programme with perceptive eyes!

While on a theatrical theme I attended a 'relaxed performance' of *The Ghost Train* at the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester. Relaxed performances are designed to welcome anyone who will benefit from a more laid-back performance environment. This can include people with an autism spectrum disorder, sensory and/or communication disorder or a learning disability. Small changes are made to the staging of a performance and there is a relaxed attitude to noise and movement. There are break-out areas for anyone who begins to feel stressed. I thoroughly enjoyed the production, as did everyone in the audience. It is hoped that these events become a regular occurrence because they allow people with disabilities to visit and experience the theatre in comfortable surroundings together with friends or family.

Wherever I go, people ask me whether I am enjoying my role. How could I not when I meet so many lovely people who seem delighted to see the High Sheriff? Some want to give me sustenance, a good number of them want a photograph of

me and all of them do wonderful work, many voluntarily. I am astonished by the generosity of people who give many hours to help their fellow citizens. Greater Manchester is renowned for its caring residents and this was never more apparent than at a recent ceremony to bestow 22 Queen's Awards for Voluntary Service, making our county the most successful for the number of awards received. Martyn Lewis CBE, the former newsreader, who chairs the national QAVS Committee, joined us for the ceremony and said he was staggered by the voluntary work being undertaken in our area.

I am truly blessed to be High Sheriff of Greater Manchester.

♣ Sharman Birtles JP DL

High Sheriff of Greater Manchester 2015-16

Below: The ceremony of the unveiling of the Gallipoli Stone in Rochdale

Bottom: At the Army Cadets range north of Bury

