



## Forays in philanthropy

Opposite page

**Top:** David Lea-Wilson with Richard Carter, both wearing their hats at Richard's request

**Bottom:** Bro Aberffraw Community celebrating its award of £250,000

**H**IGH SHERIFFS have huge opportunities to use their office for good. But with our very limited power also comes responsibility – after all if you can't get answers when you are the High Sheriff when can you?

In a deprived part of Wales (Bro Aberffraw) where benefit claimants make up 40 per cent of the population, there are second-generation families where no one has ever had a full-time job and I was particularly interested in finding out more and doing something about this. My initial idea was to get all the public agencies together and politely bang heads together! I discovered that this wouldn't work as there were more than nine active agencies. Change has to come from the bottom up so I talked to seven voluntary organisations.

My first foray discovered a micro philanthropy fund for Wales and a pitch to them secured £2,000 to start a bike hire enterprise in a beach car park close to Newborough. This could teach a number of skills to anyone interested and would introduce routine and training by servicing a need at local camp sites. We now have the funds and secure containers and are negotiating for the bikes.

Next, again through the Community Foundation in Wales, I heard that the sale of the Olympic village had released funds into the Spirit of 2012 Trust, which is dedicated to increasing participation – in sport, the arts and volunteering – in fourteen deprived yet inspired communities across the UK. After some great teamwork, the seven voluntary groups submitted a bid and came through stiff competition to be selected for an award of £250,000. This will be dispersed over the next two years with the help of an advisory committee of 11. The money will go to small, local initiatives that benefit the 5,200 people who live in one of the most beautiful but most deprived parts of Wales. The committee plans to make its first twenty £1,000 awards in National Volunteer Week in June 2015.

The other theme that dominated the year was the commemoration of the start of the First World War. Of the many ceremonies I attended the one I found most moving was in a small church near Holyhead where the candles were snuffed out one by one until only one was left. This to me symbolised how close we came to ending the civilisation that

spawned our legal system. I couldn't help thinking that the quintessentially British institution of the Shrievalty would probably have disappeared had the outcome of the last two world wars been different. It brought to mind my own grandfather who flew biplanes in the First World War and bombed submarines by tipping the plane on its side and rolling out bombs by hand; and also my wife's grandfather who was gassed in the trenches but survived to tell us how bad it really was.

At my award ceremony I chose Richard Carter, an armed forces veteran and the oldest volunteer I found in Wales who, aged 100, continues to make and sell poppies for the British Legion as he has been doing for the last 18 years. He asked to wear his service beret for the photograph and I was happy to kneel with him and wear my hat as he received a standing ovation in the court.

It has been a great year and one I feel hugely enriched by as I hang up my sword and move on.

◆ David Lea-Wilson

*High Sheriff of Gwynedd 2014-15*





*News from and about members*

