



From choirs to cheerleaders

I AM sure that most retiring High Sheriffs believe that 'their' year has been blessed with wonderful events and anniversaries that have uniquely contributed to a memorable and fulfilling year; I am no exception, events such as the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta and the general election have ensured this. There were also magnificent occasions connected to events such as VE day, the Battle of Britain and, particularly, Gallipoli, where the Herefordshire Regiment suffered such great losses; this was marked with a beating of the retreat at Suvla Barracks and a special service in the cathedral.

The Three Choirs Festival circulates between the three cathedrals of Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester. It is the oldest choir festival in the world and I was very fortunate that its 300th anniversary fell in 2015, in Hereford. Tercentenary celebrations concluded with a dramatic concert at Buckingham Palace given by the Prince of Wales, President of the Festival. In an interesting and direct link with its



past, the last chorister who sung under Elgar in Hereford died during the year.

On a smaller scale, a 'Foundation Visit' by the Hereford Cathedral choir to my packed parish church at Brampton Bryan was one of my happiest memories.

I have tried to support the arts and the heritage in the county. This has involved several personal initiatives including a forum for local history societies (of which there are over 30 in Herefordshire); I am pleased that communication between the societies has subsequently improved. In addition, I organised a forum for Herefordshire museums and visitor attractions; this has helped to concentrate views on the future of such attractions in the county – and will be referred to in the submission to DCMS Select Committee.

Herefordshire is not a rich county, but the charitable sector is both vibrant and important. The High Sheriff sees many inspirational charities at first hand and it is an unenviable task to decide which should benefit from the grants from the High Sheriff's Fund at the end of the year. In the event, grants went to the Hope Foundation, the Hereford Street Pastors and Jamie's Farm, which has recently set up its second working farm for vulnerable children in the UK, in South Herefordshire.

Many of our institutions are long established such as The Royal National College for the Blind which hosted alumnus Lord Blunkett and a team from *Any Questions*. Others are evolving, for instance

Above left: Geraint Bowen, Director of Music, Hereford Cathedral, leads the cathedral choir on a Foundation Visit to Brampton Bryan

Above: The High Sheriff with cheerleaders from the Miami Dolphins

Below left: At the legal service at Hereford Cathedral: District Judge Sheldrake, His Honour Judge Juckes QC, Victoria Harley, Edward Harley, the Rt Hon Lord Justice McFarlane, His Honour Judge Pearce-Higgins QC, and His Honour Judge Hooper QC

the new university project which gained significant momentum over the year

A team of six wounded veterans from Walking with the Wounded passed through Herefordshire. The county not only raised more than any other, but the team was accompanied by 12 'scantily clad' cheerleaders from the Miami Dolphins which set a few pulses racing in High Town.

My final duty was appropriately poignant; it involved a small service in the cathedral to remember eight young girls who died in the Garrick Theatre fire in Hereford exactly 100 years earlier. Relatives of the girls gathered with aging sepia photographs to commemorate this tragic event.

I look back over my year with happy memories and with particular thanks to my wife, Victoria, and to all those dedicated people who make Herefordshire such an incomparable place. It has been an honour to serve the county.

♣ **Edward Harley DL**
High Sheriff of Herefordshire 2015-16