



A thousand years of High Sheriffs in Herefordshire

FOR ME it was a great honour to be nominated as High Sheriff of Herefordshire. The highlight of my Declaration in April 2016 in Court No 1 of the Shire Hall in Hereford was going into the private box that has a large sign saying 'High Sheriff' beside a special seat next to the judge, and also a bench to the side for the High Sheriff's Chaplain. The significance of this was that the Shire Hall was completed in 1817 and is now celebrating its 200th anniversary.

Fascinated, I started investigating the history of High Sheriffs according to ancient documents at the new £8m Archive Centre at Rotherwas, going back to Saxon times. The manuscripts were in Old English and were difficult to decipher so I decided after the civic service in October – where I was on parade again after 50 years with my platoon sergeant – to investigate not only the last 50 years of the High Sheriffs or even 200, but to try and complete a history over the last 1,000 years. First, I had to get a team of experts together. Katherine Andrew FMA PACR, a friend over many years who had been the curator at the Herefordshire Light Infantry Museum and Hereford Museum, but now being an independent consultant, was the obvious choice, and she brought on board Dr Sylvia Pinches.

The brief was quite simple: using the new facilities at the Archive Centre to carry out research to try and identify the earliest known documented High Sheriff of Herefordshire and any other factual historical information. That is how the booklet, *A Thousand Years of High Sheriffs in Herefordshire* began its life. An exciting discovery was the High Sheriff Aelfnoth, killed in battle by Gruffydd ap Llewlyn, King of Wales on 6 June 1056

at Glasbury, on the River Wye. Also killed that day was Leofgar, Bishop of Hereford. Gruffydd was the ally and son-in-law of Aelfgar, son of Leofric, Earl of Mercia and Lady Godiva. Aelfgar had been deprived of his lands as Earl of East Anglia when Harold Godwinson (later King Harold) became Earl of East Anglia. Gruffydd had sacked Hereford the previous October and destroyed its castle.

The other exciting piece of history to be discovered related to the High Sheriff of Herefordshire and the Civil War in a petition to the House of Commons in 1642. The British Library Collection contains a copy of the petition in the form of a printed handbill. It was presented by Isaac Seward, High

Sheriff of Hereford and a group of unnamed individuals, to the House of Commons on 4 May 1642. At first sight, the document seems to be a rather sycophantic piece of flattery linked to a complaint about cheap imports of wool. Delving deeper, this single sheet of paper reveals a turbulent back story of politics, religious tensions and the rapid pace of events on the very eve of the English Civil War, 375 years ago. As a matter of interest, the reason why this document had not been discovered before was that it had been filed under Hertfordshire and not Herefordshire.

Anyone wanting a copy of *A Thousand Years of High Sheriffs in Herefordshire* can contact Bill Jackson's office, 45 Bridge Street, Hereford, HR4 9DG. Tel: 01432 344779 or email bill@jiprop.com. There is no charge but on the back page you will see that any donations to the High Sheriffs' Fund would be welcomed.

◆ Bill Jackson

High Sheriff of Herefordshire 2016-17

Right: On parade again after 50 years: the High Sheriff, a lieutenant and former platoon commander in D Company, the Herefordshire Light Infantry, with the Sergeant at Arms of Leominster Town Council, Mick Meredith, his former platoon sergeant

Below: The judge's coach outside the Shire Hall in April 1978, following restoration, taking Mr Justice Slynn to the shrieval service in Hereford Cathedral. Photograph courtesy of Hereford Museum & Gallery, Herefordshire Museum Service

