



Hertfordshire 2013-14

A lot of people have asked me, "Did you think you would be so busy?" My reply is not just busy, but how all-consuming the role of High Sheriff is. What an extraordinary privilege this gives one. I have been so well looked after and welcomed wherever I have been. I look back over the first six months of my year with amazement as to how much I have learnt and how many wonderful people I have met.

As soon as I could I visited the Crown Court in St Albans where I was made so welcome by our Judges and all the staff in the court. To sit on the bench with an eminent Judge is an enormous privilege and also to go behind the scenes with them is quite fascinating. I feel very lucky to have been part of their discussions and try to understand a small part of their legal world. I have spent a few days in the Family Court where making the right decision is difficult and flexibility is always necessary. I was lucky enough to witness an adoption celebration in court, a moving and special day in a little girl's and her new parents' life. I spent a day in the Magistrates' Court and hope to do more. It never ceases to amaze me the volume of work that these dedicated volunteers process and the common sense that three people bring to the bench, with different and



Janmastami at Hare Krishna Temple near Watford, celebrating the birthday of Lord Krishna and 40 years of devotion at the temple. Over two days approximately 70,000 people visited the temple.

varying views allowing a fair and measured decision to be made.

I have spent some interesting days with the police, visited the huge operations room at headquarters, had a ride in a car with number plate recognition technology installed and was part of an awards ceremony where officers were presented with awards for operational duties, including the Olympic torch relay, The Queen's Jubilee visit and for other events in 2011, including the huge Sonosphere Music Festival at

Knebworth. I helped launch a Rural Riders Scheme, a sort of Neighbourhood Watch on horseback, a wonderful way of involving the community in keeping the countryside safe.

I spent a fantastic day with the fire and rescue service, watching training, so important because the fire service is dealing with fewer day-to-day traditional activities, maybe because they have been so successful through their excellent work in the community. They need to be trained to the point where no stone is left unturned. The modern fire and rescue service has a strong volunteer side and a commercial wing too.

There are so many changes afoot in our justice system and within society and it remains to be seen how this will all develop. The probation service is to all intent and purpose being privatised and I sincerely hope that the expertise of its very dedicated and experienced workforce, built up over many years, is not lost. I have made two very interesting visits to our only prison in Hertfordshire, The Mount. A resettlement prison, category C, which



With members of the community at the Cheshunt Extended Services Grow Day.



News from and about Members

will grow by 250 to over 1,000 inmates. This is all against a background of cuts, a very challenging situation for the governors of our prisons today. A lot of effort is being made to give prisoners skills to help them when they are released. As a ground-breaking partnership between the prison service, the voluntary sector and local private businesses in Hertfordshire, the refreshment bar in the visits hall was relaunched in April as a new coffee bar, manned by prisoners under staff supervision. I tasted their coffee - quite delicious. We saw the very welcoming visitors' centre for families travelling long distances, and also the play area, both run by dedicated volunteers. There is great emphasis on involving and trying to keep families together; the 'caring Dad' programme is another example.

The community as a whole is made up of so many elements and getting to know mayors, with their huge experience, is something that I have really appreciated. Listening to stories of how different boroughs and districts have developed has been quite fascinating, from post-war times, when towns were built to house people from London, to the present day, where we have different communities belonging to many ethnic groups. I have visited a synagogue and the Hare Krishna Temple near Watford; I opened a Polish art exhibition and visited a forum in



With members of the East of England Ambulance Service in Cassiobury Park at the First Herts Pride event.

North Herts helping different people integrate into our communities. Taking part in a citizenship ceremony has given me an insight into the new citizens of this country and the reasons why they have made their important decisions.

Visiting so many different parts of the community is vital for a High Sheriff to understand and link things together, one of the most important parts of our role in the modern world. Volunteer centres, charities and many places buzzing with enthusiastic people, doing the most remarkable work, are for me

very enlightening. Because of the difficult financial climate, many charities are suffering and the grants that came directly from county councils are just not there. Many of these charities are competing for the same pots of money and having to spend a huge amount of time re-jigging and filling in forms.

I look forward to the next six months.

The Viscountess Trenchard
High Sheriff of Hertfordshire 2013-14