



**Working with
 prisoners
 opens doors**

I AM now nearly halfway through my year as High Sheriff of Hertfordshire and I am so glad that I took the advice from a number of previous High Sheriffs to prepare well in advance for it.

I read the diaries of the previous five High Sheriffs to get a handle on what was worth doing and what could be a waste of time. This was invaluable.

Once I had a grasp of who and what I was going to come across within the county I could begin to research how I wanted to plan my 'theme' for my year into my diary. My theme was to focus on the ever-growing prison population and why so many prisoners reoffend within such a short period of time once released.

“The most impressive people I have met so far are the enormous number of voluntary workers throughout Hertfordshire”

This subject opens so many doors that are relevant to the High Sheriff's role and duty. I have got to know the Chief Constable well and also been out with all his senior officers in the major towns of Hertfordshire. I have accompanied police constables in most of Hertfordshire's 10 boroughs and seen first-hand how they engage with 'rogue' families which have generations of reoffenders.

I have also been so impressed with so many agencies which work closely with the police to keep the young on the right track. I have got to know a number of very determined and patient probation officers who work tirelessly to support so many reoffenders that need guidance and help becoming better citizens.

I have built up a good relationship with Steve Bradford, who is Governor of the Mount Prison in Bovingdon. So much so that I have persuaded him to take on The Pimlico Theatre Group – they set up a theatre within the prison and the inmates become part of the cast with professional actors also involved; they will be performing a musical in January 2016. They will be directed by the ever-enthusiastic Michael Moody, who has managed to do this with 11 other prisons. Future High Sheriffs might want to investigate this project with their own prisons.

At the very start of my year, I made appointments with Councillors at District and County levels to see how they support dysfunctional families and the sad fall-out that comes with them.

I also sat with judges at St Albans and Watford Courts and magistrates in Hatfield. This helped me understand the subject much better and therefore I was able to ask far more relevant questions when meeting people close to the 'coal face', who were dealing with reoffenders on a daily basis.

The most impressive people I have met so far are the enormous number of voluntary workers throughout Hertfordshire. Offenders leaving prison have every chance to get back on track; I have been to walk-in drug and alcohol centres, accommodation for the homeless, shadowed offender management teams and sat in with Probation and Social Service Officers – all amazing places run by determined people.

Future High Sheriffs: if you have not made your mind up as to what to support during your year, then I can guarantee a very interesting and rewarding year ahead of you if you choose the one I have.

It will highlight a lot of the troubles within your county, but also put you in touch with wonderful people and places that give you hope and inspiration to work harder as a High Sheriff.

My wife Kate and I have also had some wonderful spectacles to enjoy, like the Homecoming Parade in Hertford by the Royal Anglian Regiment which had just returned from Afghanistan. At the end of the parade we hosted 200 soldiers in our garden party marquee in the grounds of Hertford Castle and they enjoyed lots of McMullen ale!

I am only halfway through my year but if the second half is as good as the first, it will be one of the best years of my life.

♣ **Fergus McMullen**
High Sheriff of Hertfordshire 2014-15



Above: The High Sheriff with Lord Kitchener (Dennis Rutledge) at his garden party which had a First World War commemoration theme

Opposite page
 The High Sheriff with PC Ross Paybody at Hertfordshire County Police Cadet Competition

Below: The High Sheriff at his garden party at Hertford Castle with the High Sheriff of Greater London, Mr Kevin McGrath, and his wife Kate

