

ISLE OF WIGHT

News from and about members



Waving the flag

I BATTLED long and hard during my years as High Sheriff in nomination to come up with a way that I could, during my year in office, not only raise the profile of the Shrievalty on the Island, but hopefully leave a lasting legacy of my year in office. Not an easy task!

What is so wonderful about this idyllic little island (pop: 140,000) just five miles off the coast of Hampshire is its very special, but very disparate community, which makes it such a unique place to live. It means, however, that our community of talented souls, who are all so proud to call themselves 'Islanders', rarely come together as one. I decided that I would like to try and change this and so I instigated one day

each year when the whole population of the Island would be encouraged to come together to celebrate all that is great about this special place. I created Isle of Wight Day.

In order to do this I needed the support of all the leaders of the community, so together with the Lord-Lieutenant I formed a steering group comprising the leaders of the county council, the chamber of commerce, the tourist board, the local media and other influential members of the community, assisted by the police and transport services. I announced this at my Declaration ceremony, which I held at Osborne House (the first time that HM Queen Victoria's beloved home had been used for this occasion) in April

Below: Declaration ceremony held at Osborne House: Chairman of the Bench, Chris Holmes, outgoing High Sheriff Ron Holland, Under Sheriff John Matthews, His Honour Judge Rawls, myself, Lord-Lieutenant Maj Gen Martin White, my grandson and sword carrier Finnian





and nominated Saturday 24 September to be the inaugural Isle of Wight Day.

I created a logo depicting celebratory bunting and persuaded our three cross-Solent ferry companies to come together (something that they would not normally ever do) and provide me with the funds to enable me to purchase 75 miles of colourful bunting which we then distributed free of charge throughout the whole Island and asked everyone to deck out their homes and places of business to 'Wave the flag for Isle of Wight Day'!

We organised a massive People's Parade involving several marching bands, dancers, carnival floats, vintage vehicles, and contingents of marchers from the military, the police, fire service, scouts and girl guides to name just a few. I was given the honour of leading the parade through the streets of Newport, our county town, atop an open top bus – it was like winning the FA Cup! We also organised a yachting relay through the length of the Solent involving all 16 of the sailing clubs on the Island and all the Island churches came together to mount a spectacular *Songs of Praise* concert led by the Isle of Wight Symphony Orchestra and choir, and attended by 1,000 in Cowes.

The enthusiasm of the whole county was tangible and not only was the Island covered in celebratory bunting but everyone entered into the spirit of the day by organising hundreds of events, including street parties, concerts, food fairs, tea parties and a host of other community activities involving all the schools and the whole Island community, which raised considerable sums for deserving local causes. It was also a commercial success for many Island companies and by selecting this date in September for our annual day of celebration the Island's tourist business is able to extend its crucial summer season.

As I step down after a busy but wonderful year in office, I will continue to organise this new day on our Island's calendar – our county's very own Red Nose Day – and I am happy to report that the Shrievalty is very much alive and in rude health on the Isle of Wight.

◆ Robin Courage MBE

High Sheriff of the Isle of Wight 2016-17



Top Right: At the opening of the Chelsea Garden at the Earl Mountbatten Hospice with former Isle of Wight High Sheriff Alan Titchmarsh

Right: Aboard the open top bus and waving the flag on the first Isle of Wight Day

