



A backwards and forwards look at frontline life in Kent



ON 4 July 1958 I was lying in my pram on a hot sunny day in the beautiful gardens of Ladham House, Goudhurst in Kent. At a safe distance, my grandfather was welcoming the Kent judges and his guests to the High Sheriff's garden party which was also the garden used by my great-grandfather for his garden party in 1903!

Now it is my turn. I doubt whether my grandfather was ever strapped into the back of a police squad car answering (at alarming speed) a call-out in the centre of Canterbury, or indeed had the opportunity to visit a mental health wing in one of Her Majesty's prisons in the company of his eighteen-year-old daughter. I would hazard a guess that our role is now much more proactive, inclusive and even more important as counties and their individual challenges change at an ever-increasing rate.

Perhaps one wonderful aspect that has not changed is the privilege of meeting and welcoming a royal visitor. I have been fortunate to welcome HRH the Countess of Wessex, HRH The Princess Royal and HRH the Duke of Kent. Once you have been in the shoes of a High Sheriff you really do understand the long hours and commitment required of the royal family – not to mention a certain amount of stamina!

I have already spent a night watching The Royal Engineers as they worked on a

night exercise to set charges to 'blow up' Rochester Bridge, passed off 120 new Kent Police recruits, launched a 'coffee caravan' which drives round isolated villages and learned to cook with Porchlight. We have also had a party for eighty charity guests in our barn garden to hear about new funding opportunities.

The actual heart of Kent has not much changed in character from my grandfather's day in that it is populated by communities which really care and want to make a difference and these are the people I meet every week. I have found their hard work quite overwhelming and they are always so pleased to see their High Sheriff and find out how I can help promote their organisations or simply introduce them to others in their field. Having recently renovated a sixteenth-century cart barn I have been able to put this to good use by holding receptions and networking events which I will continue to do throughout my year in office.

Luckily, we still have two Crown Courts in Canterbury and Maidstone and my admiration for our judges has increased over the year as we have held several court lunches and spent time sitting with our judiciary and listening to the difficult decisions they have to make on increasingly complicated and depressing cases. I have also made five court awards for bravery.



Top left: The High Sheriff and Mrs Jessel, with the Mayor of Maidstone, Cllr Malcolm Greer, circuit judges and borough councillors, welcoming the Hon Mr Justice Stuart-Smith to Maidstone Crown Court

Top right: The Mayor of Medway Cllr David Wildey, the High Sheriff, Brigadier Matthew Bazeley, Commandant, Royal School of Military Engineering, Kelly Tolhurst MP for Medway and Ilona Hurrell, Rochester Bridge Trust

Above L-R: Sir Charles Jessel, Bt, DL, JP, High Sheriff of Kent 1903; Sir George Jessel, Bt., MC, JP, High Sheriff of Kent 1958

My current diary is still filling with events every day and my PA (who is also my wife!) is always keen to research new organisations to visit. A happy team, the Jessel High Sheriff office is always busy with my children who come and 'help', a couple of dogs and, of course, my court dress drying on a radiator ready for its next outing.

◆ George Jessel DL
High Sheriff of Kent 2017-18