



## Unforgettable experiences

LANCASHIRE IS diverse culturally, economically and geographically, and I wanted to involve as much of it as possible in my year. Ceremonial and official engagements were many including a visit in May by HM The Queen to Lancaster when we welcomed Her Majesty both as our Queen and as the Duke of Lancaster. In early June our annual service and shield hanging ceremony took place in the Shire Hall where I received permission from the Constable of Lancaster Castle to hang my shield alongside those of my 800 predecessors in the county.

I visited our six prisons and secure units and observed the focus on reducing re-offending and preparing prisoners for release. In the wake of cuts governors remain focused, optimistic and proud of their achievements. Our largest Category B prison houses a dedicated braille unit, translating books for charities across the world.

Each term a number of High Court Judges came to Preston where I joined them in court and for dinner at their lodgings. I hosted all of them at our home, inviting a wide range of guests and having some thoroughly congenial evenings. Without exception they were good company, always appreciative of being invited and curious about the role and year of the High Sheriff.

Visits to third sector organisations working with ex-offenders were fascinating. Some, such as Jobs, Friends & Houses in Blackpool, are ground-breaking in their ideas. This community interest company, run by a serving police officer, employs ex-offenders and recovering addicts in the building trade. They are trained, paid full wages and supported as they learn about life 'outside'.

Having a named charity and trying to raise huge amounts of money was not for me. Instead I supported charities by visiting, raising their profile and helping them to make connections. The passion, humility and dedication of the volunteers were ever evident, as was the pleasure at having their organisation recognised by the High Sheriff. The RNLI, fire, special police, search and rescue services are all volunteers working to protect us in our daily lives, as are those working with the most unfortunate in our society, and they were without exception delighted to share their experiences. This took me to some highly deprived areas of Lancashire, Skelmersdale being one of the most remarkable where fabulous work with the Community Safety Partnership reaps rewards.

Among December's many carol concerts I joined a group of people from NightSafe, raising awareness of the plight of the young homeless by sleeping out in Blackburn for a night. When



**Above:** Presentation of High Sheriff's Award to Sgt Steve Hodgkins and employees of Jobs, Friends & Houses in Blackpool

I volunteered for this it was a warm summer's day. As December neared I thought I might have been a bit rash so spent some time designing my cardboard shelter and was thankful for it. Among several visitors over the night the least welcome was Storm Desmond.

On 10 April 2015 I processed into the Council Chamber in County Hall, Preston, proud and slightly self-conscious in my uniform. Two weeks ago I repeated the walk still proud and with a year's unforgettable experiences upon which to reflect. Throughout the year my husband Robert has accompanied me and has enjoyed it as much as I have, and I am grateful for his support, patience and encouragement.

◆ **Amanda Parker JP**  
*High Sheriff of Lancashire 2015-16*



**Above:** Outside Lancaster Castle before proceeding to the Shire Hall Photo by Denis Oates

**Right:** Early rising after a night sleeping on the streets of Blackburn in my special cardboard shelter

