



Merseyside 2013-14



Speaking to some of the 'hidden gems' I invited to a celebration dinner prior to stepping down.

St George's Day may seem a little late to be installed as High Sheriff, but in the County Palatine of Lancaster, of which Merseyside is part, Her Majesty does not prick the lites until a few weeks before one's shrieval year starts. So although I had as much notice as any other in nomination, it had to remain a secret, which complicated many issues.

My Declaration took place in the iconic Port of Liverpool building. One of the Three Graces on Liverpool's world heritage waterfront, it was chosen as being a hidden gem which very few enter. My main objective has been to seek out hidden gems throughout the whole county – be they buildings, views, organisations, individuals and even ideas – to find them, and to draw attention to them.

The first hidden gem was the Office of High Sheriff! I found that there was almost complete ignorance about the role, about the Duchy of Lancaster, about the relationship with Lord-Lieutenants or about the relevant history. I sought to overcome it by publicising my visits in the local press, by tweeting comments about key visits and by revising the High Sheriffs' Association booklet, hopefully to encourage a wider audience to read it.

I have taken every opportunity to sit with Magistrates, Crown Court and High Court Judges. I had not realised that 96 per cent of all cases are heard in the Magistrates' Courts, or what a sad cross section of society enter their doors – often revolving doors! Many people find it hard to break the cycle. That led me to the world of those marvellous

organisations which support and guide people back into society.

The Probation Service is the formal route, but there are many charities which focus on young people who have grown up in care, and on those with learning difficulties. The Prince's Trust, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, the Scouts, Merseyside Police and Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority: all these organisations and many more local charities which help the hungry, the homeless, the bereaved, the long-term unemployed, I have visited, to thank them, to encourage them, and to spread the word about the forces for good that they represent.

Every primary school I visited impressed me with the children's enthusiasm, their sense of humour and



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their enquiring minds. I recall a nativity play where the shepherds donned dark glasses – 'the angels are so bright; we'd better put our shades on' – and the perennial fascination with one's sword – 'Is there blood on your sword Sir?' or 'Do you kill people with it?', which would draw my response 'Not this week – yet!'

The staff too were deeply committed to supporting the children, particularly in areas of deprivation. Outside the school gates often exists a very different world – a world of street gangs, of drugs and worse. But at Faith Primary School in Liverpool, all the children learn to play a musical instrument throughout their time there, taught by volunteer members of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.

Volunteering has been at the centre of my year. Town Hall banquets are a thing

of the past due to drastic budget cuts, so of the 450 or so visits I have made, the vast majority have involved meeting volunteers and appreciating the work they do.

Helping to clear up a housing estate nicknamed 'Beirut' in one borough, creating one with a waiting list to live there, shows what can be done. Coming across retired Liverpool and England footballer Allan Kennedy coaching young homeless people in Toxteth on Christmas morning gave some balance to the depressing sight of mindless youths sniggering in the dock as the murder they have perpetrated on some hapless victim is described in court.

Though now very tired, we held a dinner in my last week for 170 hidden gems whom we have met throughout the year, and presented over fifty of them with High Sheriff's certificates. It

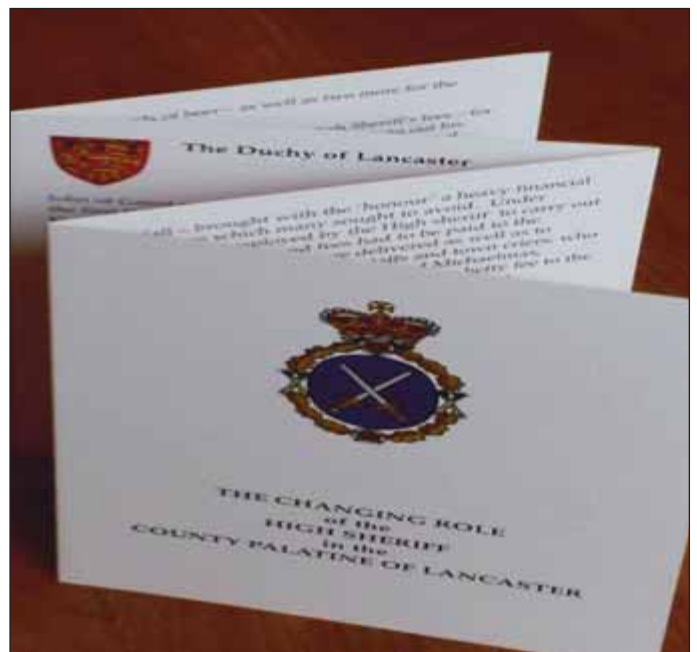
was interesting to bring together such an eclectic group of people who all had the same ethos – to help people. As our Chief Constable said 'They've all got such open faces'.

Before my shrieval year began, I wondered how often I would have to wear my heavy uniform, especially as the hottest summer for decades was approaching. As I finish, I now know that it is essential to wear it on every possible occasion. Be it a DL's or military uniform, it adds an enormous amount of gravitas, and at least partly because of it, the Shrievalty is still alive and well on Merseyside. □

Ian Meadows OBE DL
High Sheriff of Merseyside 2013-14



Over 50 High Sheriff's certificates were presented to my 'hidden gems'.



Over a thousand of these booklets were distributed during the year to people who wanted to know more about our history.