



# The future looks bright

EDUCATION WAS a central theme of my shrieval year which started appropriately with my installation in Liverpool University's Victoria Building, Alfred Waterhouse's terracotta masterpiece, from which the term 'red-brick university' originated. I was doubly blessed with two chaplains: one a Muslim of my own faith and one from the majority Christian faith. The education theme was highlighted by many visits to local schools, and there can be no more heart-warming greeting to any official visitor than a class of infants shouting out in unison 'Good Morning, High Sheriff.' The older girls at Merchant Taylors' were no less welcoming and my own name will be immortalised on the plaque I unveiled there to commemorate the opening of the new primary wing of the school.

Apart from the ceremonial duties, every High Sheriff will be inspired by the intensity and dedication of the work of the voluntary sector that they will encounter. I was just amazed. Up and down Merseyside, from Southport to Liverpool, and across from Wirral to Knowsley and St Helens, there is just so much good work being done, particularly for and by young people. As my predecessor said, the role of the High Sheriff is often to thank the un-thanked for the work they do. I felt I was only scratching the surface of a bedrock of civil society that is invisible to much of the outside world, certainly to most of the media. It would be invidious to



Marine rescue boat of the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service with the High Sheriff, her husband and police cadets, Danielle and Tom



Plaque unveiling at Merchant Taylors' School, Crosby, Jan 2015

highlight one particular project – there were so many – but I must flag up that Merseyside won first place in this year's National Crimebeat Awards with 'Emotions', a wonderful and truly original project which uses dance and theatre to communicate the societal effects of crime to young people who might otherwise be tempted to go down that route.

Each of the armed services was very supportive during my shrieval year and I was particularly impressed by the youthful enthusiasm of all their cadet corps, and of course by the Scouts. The police, co-sponsors of our crime prevention initiatives, supplied my two cadets, Danielle and Tom, who as well as accompanying me during royal visits, carried my borrowed sword for the Judges' Service at the Anglican Cathedral. Both cathedrals saw a great deal of Bob, my husband (and self-appointed *Shrievalty Factotum*), and me during the year. What must be fairly unique is that we attended the installation of the new Diocesan Bishop of Liverpool, the new Roman Catholic Archbishop of Liverpool, and the new Rector of Liverpool Parish Church of Our Lady and St Nicholas – all three in one year.

Because my year coincided with the centenary of the outbreak of the Great War, I witnessed many very poignant events – from the giant marionettes of the *Royale de Luxe* memorably parading through Liverpool, to marking the

departure of the 'Liverpool Pals' from Lime Street station in 1914. Even more moving were Remembrance Sunday outside St George's Hall; the Royal Marines' commemoration of the 1918 Zeebrugge Raid (following which British troops and casualties were taken off by many small ships, including our own Mersey ferries); and Merchant Navy Day in Liverpool commemorating the 36,000 seafarers who died at sea in World War Two.

The sea and particularly the River Mersey have been a very strong focus during my year. As well as being entertained on three of Her Majesty's and one of His Royal Netherlands Majesty's warships, I spent a fascinating day learning about the flora and fauna of Sefton's coastline; I was taken out on the rescue boat of the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service – by far the best and most exhilarating way to see the county; and, looking to the future, I found Peel Group's vision for a new deep-water port and massive new developments on both sides of the river simply breathtaking. The most encouraging event of my whole year was probably the Mersey Maritime Awards extravaganza in March this year celebrating the successes of 1,700 maritime-based businesses with 20,000 new jobs anticipated.

Merseyside doesn't just have a unique and proud history; it has a great future.

◆ Abila Pointing MBE DL  
*High Sheriff of Merseyside 2014-2015*