



Many-faceted Merseyside

BY THE time this article is published I will have entered the shadowy, twilight zone of the 'Has Beens'. Whatever it holds can't possibly match, for intensity and interest, the year I've just experienced or the one upon which my successor, Jim Davies, will have embarked. He will find, as did I, that the High Sheriff has remarkable and in some respects, unique, access to many facets of life here on Merseyside.

At my Declaration last year, I said that, for someone born and brought up in Liverpool, and who has never lived anywhere else, it was a huge honour and privilege to be asked to fulfil the role of High Sheriff and to play a part in the civic and ceremonial life of the county. Now, twelve months later, I wouldn't change a single word of that assertion.

The last year has, for me, been a constant flow of always interesting, frequently uplifting and occasionally inspirational events. It's not necessary to dig very deeply below the surface of Merseyside to discover the good work being carried out day in day out in many spheres of activity including commerce and education and in the public and voluntary sectors. Among the most impressive are the many youth organisations, run by dedicated volunteers, which provide a focus, a framework and a future for countless young people, some of whom, due to strained domestic circumstances and a lack of guidance, would be at risk of going off the rails. It was, therefore, particularly pleasing to attend the National Crimebeat Awards in London where a group of young people I had nominated from a Knowsley youth club won a prize of £750 for a project providing their peer group with information and advice on 'How to Stay Safe and not be a Victim of Crime'. The initiative is already proving to be very effective in the local community.

It has been an extraordinarily busy year but this is not the occasion to go into detail about literally hundreds of engagements which have filled the diary. Suffice to say that any role which encompasses attendance at six royal visits, observing at close quarters trainee firefighters tackling a blaze, announcing parliamentary election results live on TV at 4.00 in the morning, hosting 17 visiting High Court Judges at home, and acting

Opposite page: The grandson of a local mayor aims to be the country's youngest High Sheriff!

Below: A convivial private dinner with the Lord Mayor of Liverpool and the Mayors of Knowsley, St Helens, Sefton and Wirral

as a judge myself, albeit, at a primary school Easter Bonnet competition, can, with some justification, be described as 'varied'.

There were, I suppose inevitably, a couple of low points. The funeral of PC David Phillips, held in Liverpool Cathedral, was a poignant and significant event not just on Merseyside but throughout the country. To those of us present, or to those who simply watched it on television, the overwhelming support offered by members of the public who stood in silent respect along the full length of the route taken by the cortege was the only modicum of good which could be discerned in an otherwise wholly tragic episode. There was also the sad loss of Sir Alan Waterworth, the immediate past Lord-Lieutenant of Merseyside.

It's a cliché, but nevertheless true, that for me the last 12 months have flown by.

Apart from the two exceptions I have just mentioned, it has been a hugely enjoyable experience and I thank the Lord-Lieutenant, Dame Lorna Muirhead, and those who advised her, for giving me the opportunity to undertake the role.

The support of my wife, Patti, throughout the last 12 months has been unfailing. I would wish to record that it was a team effort and that she and I have wonderful joint memories to carry to what we both hope will be our distant dotage.

♣ **Robert Owen JP DL**
High Sheriff of Merseyside

