



Life is not all about taking

MY YEAR serving my county as High Sheriff has been the busiest and most exciting and rewarding of my life so far. As I set out in April 2017, I undertook to set charity organisations in my sights and to a large extent that has been achieved with an assortment of fundraising events for Help for Heroes, Headway and ABF The Soldiers' Charity.

In the second part of my year in office my days got busier with various court cases in both Teesside and York Crown Courts. One particularly shocking trial was that of David Dearlove who murdered his young stepson in 1968; the victim's brother witnessed the killing but was told by Dearlove not to mention what he had witnessed. In 2015 the defendant posted a photograph on Facebook of him holding the 18-month-old whom he was to murder a couple of weeks later. The brother of the victim could not keep the secret for any longer and reported the crime to the police. Dearlove, aged 71, was sent down for 15 years.

On a lighter and more positive note I had the privilege of giving awards to officers in the North Yorkshire Police. One such was to Kimberley Copestack of Firearms who had performed a very brave act under the radar. In the line of duty she uses a Glock machine pistol, a good weapon made in Austria. As I presented her with a fairly hefty cheque in an envelope I said, 'Kimberley, you'll be able to buy yourself a good firearm with this.' She replied, 'High Sheriff, I'll ask North Yorkshire Police to buy one for me.'

I attended several briefings at Yorkshire's RAF stations and left each of them comfortable and safe in the knowledge that we are in good hands. One briefing outside the county was to RAF Bulmer in Northumberland. This station tracks every aircraft whether military or civilian, friend or foe within 250 miles of the UK. Persistent offenders are the Russians. One such incident was when a Blackjack Bomber could have been heading for London, so was duly intercepted by a squadron of Typhoons from RAF Lossiemouth. The pilot backed off and once our radar locked on to him he flew north over the Shetlands, the Western Isles, Ireland, The Bay of Biscay,



Attending Matins and the North Eastern Circuit Annual Legal Service at York Minster in October 2017



Gibraltar, the western and eastern Mediterranean heading for Syria, where he discharged his bomb load. 2018 is the centenary of the founding of the RAF and I congratulate them on a fine effort in difficult situations.

In December my wife and I attended the opening of Scruton Station on the Wensleydale Railway. Several hundred thousand pounds had been spent on the station thanks to an English Heritage grant to bring it back to its former glory. Everyone who works on the line does so entirely voluntarily. With charities in my sight I have offered some help. I am not sure in what capacity: a fireman or The Fat Controller more likely...

In March 2018 I elected to be imprisoned in HMP Kirklevington in aid of Headway and the ABE. Various friends donated a magnificent £16,616.25. I ate supper with a murderer and a petty offender. Angie Petit the governor is doing sterling work in this prison, as is being done in the Category A prison at Full Sutton; my wife and I came away from both establishments with a feeling that there was a great deal of respect and trust between the authorities and the inmates and vice versa. It quickly taught me that people serving sentences are not to be abandoned and every help is given to enable them to fit back into society once they are released. The prison authorities are doing a first-class job at both prisons and deserve congratulations.

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Throughout the year my wife and I have entertained many of the judges on the North Eastern Circuit at relaxed Sunday lunches and the occasional dinner with several of our friends joining us which we found gave the occasions a personal touch.

When I look back at this unique experience I am forever grateful for all the doors that have opened – among others – to the courts, the military bases, the many services at York Minster and Ripon Cathedral, and the North Yorkshire Police Force ably commanded by the terrific Dave Jones, who proudly admitted that North Yorkshire is the safest county in which to live in Britain. I recommend a year as High Sheriff to anyone because it can be so fulfilling. My late father once said to me that life is not all about taking but giving, and how right he was.

◆ **Simon Wrightson**

High Sheriff of North Yorkshire 2017-18

