



## Oxfordshire 2013-14

### *'So what does a High Sheriff do?'*

There cannot have been many events which I attended where someone did not ask this question. Despite it being the longest continuously held secular office in the country after the Crown, large numbers of people have no idea what it is all about.

Very early on I developed a well rehearsed response, usually starting with a little bit of the history of the office. Oxfordshire makes this easy by the fact that in the Crown Court in Oxford the names of all the High Sheriffs of the county from Wynsige in 995 to me are listed in chronological order. A history of the Shrievalty, published in 1995, provides brief biographical histories of all who have served over the past 1,000 years.

Thus, in making awards to the police, it was useful to be able to refer to Sir Reginald Maynes who in 1378 was involved in the 'investigation of a murder at High Wycombe' and to Sir Humphrey Foster who in 1467 was commissioned to 'enquire into the capture of swans and cygnets on the Thames and its tributaries by hooks, nets, lymestrings and other engines and the taking of swans eggs and to arrest and imprison the offenders'.

Introducing our annual law lecture I could refer to Robert Mayot in 1681, who had the duty of conveying Stephen Colledge, a participant in the popish plot, to Oxford for his trial for treason and subsequently of superintending his hanging and quartering in Oxford goal.

Similarly, Oxford Castle which has recently been transformed from HM Prison Oxford into a Malmaison hotel and tourist centre was originally built by one Robert D'Oyly in 1071-73. While he seems to have never been High Sheriff, no fewer than six members of that family were during the



Leading the parade at the Cowley Road Carnival.

12th century – useful information when talking to the Oxford Preservation Trust.

In explaining what a High Sheriff does I could list formal events such as citizenship ceremonies, Remembrance Day, mayor makings, civic services and carol concerts. While they were interesting and enjoyable and important as contributions to the civic life of the county, the greater learning and lots of the really interesting things came elsewhere.

We have virtually no visiting judges in Oxfordshire but my wife and I sat in Crown, Magistrates' and Coroners' Courts and took part in the magistrates' mock trials. My being High Sheriff opened doors not normally open to the public and it was a privilege to visit our local prison and a detention centre for refugees and asylum seekers. We also had much more contact with the police than I expected, including an eight-hour shift on our bikes with the Community Police Bike Patrol in East Oxford. A fascinating insight into the realities of frontline policing.



# News from and about Members

I also helped to raise funds with charity dinners in aid of women's football, and the Cowley Road Carnival, a gala event held in East Oxford. I led the parade in court dress on the hottest Sunday in the summer – not the most comfortable occasion.

We also organised an open gardens event and a lecture in support of Emmaus Oxford, a charity which provides housing and work for the homeless. My biggest challenge, in support of the Oxford Playhouse, was a 300km bike ride in one day in Sweden, one of the classic rides in Europe

which attracts 23,000 competitors. I had the honour of being the oldest international rider.

Thanking people for the amazing things they do to make our society work was also one of the real pleasures of the year. I had thought I knew the county well but time and time again I was humbled to learn of the outstanding contributions people make to their communities. Simply visiting their projects and taking an interest in what they are doing was often enough but the High Sheriff's Awards provided a wonderful opportunity to recognise

people who have had a long-term impact on the lives of others setting an example for others to follow.

There was also a lot of fun and perhaps none more so than when I met the Sheriff of Nottingham at Oxford Castle. With Robin Hood on the pantomime stage in the Playhouse, what could be more appropriate than meeting the pantomime sheriff and welcoming him into the county.

In Oxfordshire we do not have an Under Sheriff as other counties do. In the year before taking office the High Sheriff in nomination is referred to as the Under Sheriff but the administrative burden in year falls entirely on the High Sheriff. I dealt with some of the load by using e-mail for communication and compiling Excel spreadsheets but my main advice to my successor was to get some administrative support if only to help with the big events. I attended 199 events during the year but also spent untold hours at my desk. This might be a special lesson for Oxfordshire but I suspect for others too. Being High Sheriff is not all about civic events and social functions; it is also a busy management job.

In sum, it was a great year in which my wife and I experienced the huge diversity of the county and I hope did our bit towards making the Oxfordshire boat go a little bit faster. □

**Professor Graham Upton**  
*High Sheriff of Oxfordshire 2013-14*



Meeting the pantomime Sheriff of Nottingham at Oxford Castle.