



Caring for carers

MY YEAR started on the high note of ‘United for Peace: Three counties united against extremism’, the third interfaith service organised by The Oxford Foundation, founded by Imam Monawar Hussain. It took place at Eton’s Dorney Lake and assembled Christians, Hindus, Humanists, Jews, Muslims and Sikhs from across the Thames Valley. Each contributed to the service, whether in prayer or in song, and we heard moving addresses from the brother of an aid worker killed by terrorists in Syria while working in a refugee camp and from a young survivor of the Peshawar Military Academy massacre. It was a truly uplifting experience.

My next experience was quite different. As part of the celebration of the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare’s birthday, the Oxford Preservation Trust invited both Town and Gown to visit the remarkable painted room in what was the ‘Crown Tavern’ in Cornmarket where the playwright used to stay with his friends the Davenants when he visited the city. The Lord Mayor of Oxford, county councillors, distinguished academics and I assembled in our finery in Oxford Town Hall before processing to Cornmarket and up the stairs to Betfred. Or at least, that is how it must have looked to the curious crowds outside! We actually climbed a further flight of stairs to the beautiful Elizabethan painted room where we were treated to mulled wine and cake, an entertaining performance of Ovid’s *Pyramus and Thisbe* by Creation Theatre and a fascinating talk by Sir Jonathan Bate.

Royal visits have included one by HRH The Duke of Cambridge who came to Oxford to open two exceptional buildings, the Weston Library and the Blavatnik School of Government. He was happily reunited with his former Vice Chancellor, Louise Richardson, who has moved from St Andrews to Oxford University.

I have chosen carers as my cause for the year: that huge group of people of all ages who look after their partners, relatives or friends who are ill or

disabled. The effects of caring on their health, both mental and physical, are considerable and young carers also lag in educational and social attainment. During my year so far, I have hosted a number of groups of carers at Rycote, where I live, for tea and cake and a tour of the gardens and historic chapel. It is sobering that even such a small break from the daily routine has proved extremely popular. I have also hosted a fundraising concert and dinner, enlisting the help of Sholto Kynoch and young singers from the Oxford Lieder Festival. People were incredibly generous and as a result some significant donations will be made to a number of groups involved with carers within the county. I spoke at the Big Event during Carers’ Week and met many organisations dedicated to making carers’ lives easier. I am also encouraging ‘networking’ among such groups, in the hope that cross-fertilisation



At Carers’ Week Big Event

of ideas will result. I have found that the convening power of the title of High Sheriff is considerable in persuading people from all walks of life to talk to each other. This is a huge responsibility but it is also a humbling honour.

◆ Sarah Taylor
High Sheriff of Oxfordshire 2016-17

Below: Greeting HRH The Duke of Cambridge outside the Blavatnik School of Government

