



## Competing with Olympians

RATHER THAN hosting a drinks party, I decided to put together an evening with five speakers talking on subjects connected to the theme for my High Sheriff's year – 'The Opportunity and Challenge of Old Age'. More than 250 people gathered in the Mitchell Theatre at Packwood Haugh School for what turned out to be a very stimulating evening.

Professor James Goodwin, head of research at Age UK, got things under way with an unexpected but well-received joke, and then went on to give us an insight into the extraordinary scale and pace of change to our global, national and local demographic. International tennis player and GP, Bill Gowans, who is also the clinical lead of FutureFit, the programme to transform NHS services across the county, talked with great passion about the local implications of this change. Baroness Warnock, at 91 a wonderful example of how to make the most of later life, introduced the idea of Teach Last. This is her scheme to encourage people in later life back into the classroom – an initiative that our local MP Philip Dunne is supporting. Virginia Ironside, agony aunt, author and performer, made us all laugh, and Mark Stevenson, an expert on global trends and innovation, warned us that ageing may become optional. The evening ended with a fantastic curry supper.

With curries and finger buffets taking their toll on our waistlines, my wife Annabel and I signed up for the Severn Mile Swim. Shrewsbury owes its very existence to the River Severn which loops around the town and is becoming cleaner every year as the arrival of otters in the town demonstrates.

The decision to enter this race was not made lightly: Annabel and I decided that if we were going to participate we wanted to do well. An intensive mile-a-day training regime in the ten days leading up to the big day gave us every reason to be hopeful of a strong showing in this mile-long swim through the centre of Shrewsbury. Who were we kidding? A mile a day for ten years would have been more like it. One hundred and forty swimmers leapt into the river at the Welsh Bridge, swam downstream to the Kingsland Bridge and then back up to the Pengwern boathouse. After only 16 minutes the winner was back on dry land. Had there been a prize for last place it would have been my great pleasure to present it to my wife, whose elegant breaststroke brought her home twenty minutes later – I struggled home a few minutes and a dozen





## News from and about members



**Opposite page:** David and Annabel Stacey at the Severn Mile Swim

**Left:** Baroness Warnock speaking at 'The Opportunities and Challenge of Old Age'

places ahead of her. This, as it turned out, was a gathering of pretty serious swimmers including current and former Olympians. We were both proud to get round without drowning and for raising a bit of money for my two charities, Age UK and the Severn Hospice. There were competitors from Herefordshire, Staffordshire, Birmingham, Cheshire and Warwickshire – they all expressed great disappointment that their High Sheriffs were not swimming. I fully expect a better turnout next year – it's on 21 August.

◆ **David Stacey**  
*High Sheriff of Shropshire 2015-16*