



# Still time to complete the puzzle

I ENTERED the Legal Service at Wells Cathedral on 13 March with a fairly good idea of what the High Sheriff stood for – I was following in my father's footsteps, as he had been High Sheriff of Avon in 1993. I was less sure of exactly where to stand, and over the last six months I have found myself at the front and back, left, right and centre and at the top of a very tall building for a topping-out ceremony. On leaving the Cathedral I was confronted by a large number of tourists, one of whom was heard to say: 'Oh look, they must be filming the next episode of *Wolf Hall*.' I have been able to walk through Bath in full velvets without a comment or glance. Every day is a Jane Austen re-enactment, and I am just another aspiring Darcy. My appearance in other parts of the county has been met with some bemusement and amusement. Somerset is a very large county made up of seven districts, each with its own chair, to complement the multitude of mayors. The weight of the chains is quite staggering, and the official cars outshine my old Volvo.

I have tried to regard the county as a whole and my first half has been spent identifying the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle

in preparation for forming a fuller picture. Somerset is blessed with many impressive and inspiring institutions, organisations and individuals, from the World Heritage City of Bath, to small charities (making big differences), to one-woman bands. I sense that they do not all know or identify with each other, and I have taken upon myself the role of matchmaker. In the year of Brexit I am encouraging partnerships, at least on a local level. Perhaps twinning should be taking place closer to home.

I held my garden party at the American Museum at Claverton – I am not giving up on international relationships! It was an ideal occasion to make introductions, and I also used the opportunity to present awards to seven super PCSOs who do so much for their local communities. The emergency services are often too modest, or busy, to blow their own trumpets, but we were able to celebrate 100 years of women in policing in Somerset. Recruitment of women officers is now at 50 per cent, three of the four Assistant Chief Constables are female, and male High Sheriffs are currently in a minority in the West Country (and I am blessed to have Annie Maw as Lord-Lieutenant).

On occasions I have possibly not performed with the competence, or confidence, of my forbears. I discovered vertigo halfway up the old Cadbury Building in Keynsham, while being filmed by the local television company. I was startled to find a mouse ascending my tights in a parish church. A bishop had to reposition me in a procession (with the wise words 'The first shall be last, and the last shall be first'). And in an effort to stay within the speed limits I have not always been the first to arrive. But it has all been such fun and I have six months to redeem myself and complete the puzzle.

◆ Edward Bayntun-Coward  
*High Sheriff of Somerset 2016-17*

**Below:** The High Sheriff with Prince Michael Mekonnen, the grandson of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia, on the Prince's visit to Bath in May 2016. This marked the 80th anniversary of the arrival of the Emperor in the city which gave his family refuge after they had been made homeless by the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1936

**Bottom:** The High Sheriff with the Chief Constable's PA wearing a 100-year-old policewoman's uniform to mark the centenary of the introduction of females into Somerset Constabulary



**Above:** Presentation of the High Sheriff's Awards to seven police officers and police community support officers at the American Museum in Britain



Photo credit: Guy Joynson

