



## Staffordshire 2012-13

2012-13 – what a year to be High Sheriff! Despite the wettest summer ever, followed by the longest, coldest winter for almost 50 years, it was also the year of the Diamond Jubilee and the amazing Olympics and Paralympics.

I suspect that a museum curator does not often hold this ancient office, so I decided that, as well as law and order, I would focus on things I knew best: museums, music and the military – my husband, Michael, is a Judge Advocate and I work in military museums.

I started by researching and mounting an exhibition in the Ancient High House in Stafford entitled *Keeping the King's Peace: A history of Law and Order in Staffordshire*. This enabled me to find out the history of the different agencies of law-keeping over the centuries: judiciary, magistracy, police, prisons and, of course, the High Sheriff. I was also able to showcase some of the fascinating collections held in the county's museums, such as the register of prisoners executed at Stafford Gaol, the chalice and paten used in the condemned cell, a 19th-century chief constable's uniform, constables' swords, an evil-looking scold's bridle and the death masks of Palmer, the infamous Rugeley poisoner. The exhibition was opened by our Lord-Lieutenant, Ian Dudson (High Sheriff 2010-11), on the day of my first Court Opening and formal lunch, and the day after my Declaration, so it was definitely 'in at the deep end'

We were swept up in the Jubilee fervour with Staffordshire's entry in the Jubilee Water Pageant, the last operational steam narrow-boat, originally rescued and restored by a past High Sheriff, Nicholas Bostock. We gave *President* and her butty, *Kildare* a send-off from Fradley Junction on her journey down the Grand Union Canal. On the Pageant Day itself the Lieutenancy hosted sponsors and supporters on the paddle steamer



Celebrating the return of *President* and her crew from the Jubilee Water Pageant.

*Tattershall Castle* to cheer her on. We were pretty drenched, but not as much as Her Majesty and the Royal party.

As well as attending High Court Judges and Circuit Judges in Stafford Crown Court, I focused on supporting the armed services over the summer and in particular, the cadets. The Dacre Sword, presented to the best male cadet in the ATC annually, was won last year by a member of the Staffordshire Wing, CWO Luke Horobin – a proud occasion.

I visited several times the Armed Forces Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum near my home. The annual Remembrance Day Service was particularly moving, but even more poignant was the annual service held to dedicate new names inscribed on the walls of the memorial. Sadly, there were several this year, mainly representing casualties from Afghanistan. Speaking to the families of those servicemen afterwards was one of the most difficult things that I have had to do this year.

One of the two charities I supported was SSAFA Forces Help. With MOD

Stafford being expanded and the new Defence Medical Services HQ moving to Whittington Barracks, Lichfield, the number of services personnel living in the county will expand, needing the support of agencies such as SSAFA.

As an historian, my fundraiser for SSAFA was to revive the ancient custom of 'Beating the Bounds', of the county rather than a city or parish. The 260-mile round trip would have been too long for my horse, so we used my 1928 Austin 7 'Chummy' as the High Sheriff's transport, 'with a posse of four other Austin 7s and my chaplain in his MG Midget. The expedition had the joint purpose of raising money for SSAFA and ensuring that I visited the far-flung places in the county which otherwise I might not reach. The three-day expedition also highlighted the extraordinary beauties of our county, which boasts not only Flash, England's highest village, but also the western bank of glorious Dovedale. We had a wonderful time and raised a respectable amount for our chosen good cause.

I enjoy music and singing, so I supported music-making among young



# News from and about Members

people. I became President of the Friends of Staffordshire's Young Musicians and enjoyed performances by the county's three youth orchestras, school choirs, talented soloists and jazz bands. Cuts in funding for the arts in schools have bitten hard, so FOSYM exists to attract donations and to raise awareness of the part that music can play in children's development. As one young person said "If I didn't have my drumming, I would be hanging out on the streets and getting into trouble". To raise funds for the Young Musicians, we put on a High Sheriff's Birthday Concert with performers ranging from



The High Sheriff and her Austin 7, Chummy, prepare to 'Beat the Bounds'.



My swordbearer, Cadet SSgt Adam Wyllie, at the Summer Term Court Service.

five years old to 19 showing plenty of talent and enthusiasm, which both deserve support.

After a crescendo of activity and carol services around Christmas, it was suddenly New Year and I had only three and a half months left. Somehow I managed to squeeze in visits to the rest of Staffordshire's eight prisons, and to Magistrates' Courts, the Probation Service and the two Coroners' Courts. I sat with the Mid Staffordshire Coroner when he declared the latest finds from the Anglo-Saxon Staffordshire Hoard to be Treasure, a very special day since the Office of High Sheriff is almost as old as the Hoard itself. Towards the end of my year, I presented High Sheriff's

Court Awards to several brave and observant witnesses in both Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent Crown Courts.

Looking back over the year, I cannot believe how much I managed to pack in. It has been a privilege to serve as High Sheriff of Staffordshire, to become more familiar with the justice system, to support the emergency services and to meet so many selfless and dedicated people who give up so much of their time to helping others. □

**Sarah Elsom, DL**  
*High Sheriff of Staffordshire 2012-13*