



Cheerleader for the 21st century

I HAD been warned that a question frequently asked of High Sheriffs by curious schoolboys was whether we ever used the sword to stab anybody. Sure enough, as I stood before a primary school assembly, I found myself facing that very test. On the same occasion, a much smarter schoolgirl took one look at my uniform enquiring if that was what I wore during the day, then what did I wear at night in bed. This enquiry inspired the commissioning of some shrieval pyjamas in the finest Suffolk silk. This exquisite material is made in Sudbury's historic mills and is prized in the world's design houses. In fact the question most often asked is what purpose we High Sheriffs serve. Attempting to answer this by reference to the Sheriff's traditional role usually proved unsatisfactory. We assume that all public offices in Britain are historic so the more pertinent question is why have some of them survived?

As somebody whose day job is the support of entrepreneurs and new enterprise, I had planned to spend my time showcasing Suffolk's good businesses. The county is blessed with numerous small and medium-sized companies which create worthwhile jobs, engage with the wider community and pay their taxes in the country in which they are earned. After only a few weeks, it became

clear to me that as well as these more established organisations, there are many thousands of volunteers, charities and social enterprises working alongside and often among them. Most are small and under-resourced but they are all trying to turn society's problems round, and they all face the familiar issues which occupy the minds of those of us who work in the world of commercial entrepreneurs. I am not alone in observing that there is a new proliferation of these mainly volunteer groups. Many are newly formed and others are being asked to do more than hitherto. Often operating in apparent isolation, these individuals and organisations lack 'cheerleaders'. It seemed to me that the 21st-century sheriff is well placed to become a cheerleader for this expanding community. We can only do so much in a short year but campaigning for the unsung heroes and bringing them together with others in their field and those who might help them made a much more satisfactory response for those curious people asking what a sheriff is for. More satisfactory than taking the questioner back to the 13th century to explain our role.

Of course the expansion of the voluntary sector is really an extension of the civic society founded on the administration of justice. I quickly



Above: Removing an internal fence on the reopening of Knettishall Heath reserve in Suffolk's Brecklands. From left to right: William Kendall, High Sheriff of Suffolk; Peter Cox, Managing Director of WREN; Ian Brown, Chairman of Trustees at Suffolk Wildlife Trust; Julian Roughton, Chief Executive of Suffolk Wildlife Trust and Phil Rothwell, of the Heritage Lottery Fund

learned that the Suffolk courts and police are as dependent on volunteers as everybody else. Meanwhile, I was able to help challenge the decision to close two-thirds of the county's Magistrates' Courts, a battle still raging.

I wanted to illustrate my interest in how the arts and the environment can improve the lives of all in our society. So I hosted relevant events in our spectacular Snape Maltings concert hall and also added a new prize to the High Sheriff's Awards for organisations working with the environment. In this and many other areas, I found invaluable support from our brilliant Community Foundation.

A year is a very short time. My predecessor set a stunning example of what can be achieved. Close collaboration with her and my successor has greatly enhanced our usefulness without remotely committing each other to any particular action. I was dreading being the Suffolk sheriff who let the side down. Thanks to the help from many friends, I may have just escaped this fate.

◆ William Kendall DL
High Sheriff of Suffolk 2016-17



Left: Suffolk High Sheriff's Award winners on stage at Snape Maltings along with National Crimebeat Special Award winners Wassup