



A simple 'thank you' goes a long way

FOLLOWING ADVICE given at the excellent seminars at Burghley and elsewhere, I tried to hit the ground running after my Declaration ceremony at the Birmingham Crown Court on 11 April. The West Midlands is a large multi-cultural area with three cities and four other metropolitan councils, and all are well organised in respect of civic responsibilities. There followed a considerable number of invitations to mayor-making, guild and other ceremonies. Unfortunately, it was not possible to attend all but it started to become clear very quickly the degree to which local areas are very proud of their heritage, despite challenges existing in a number of areas.

A number of events, such as flag-raising ceremonies, in honour of the armed forces in general were held and it was very poignant to be beside men in their nineties who, in the war, were commandos parachuting into enemy territory. We have moved on well in society since the time of Thomas Barratt whose 100th anniversary of being awarded the Victoria Cross I was privileged to attend in Dudley. After a childhood spent in the workhouse he died

on the battlefield aged 22. This service was also attended by Johnson Beharry VC, a serving VC holder.

My themes for the year are to assist young people wherever possible and to promote social cohesion. I have been very pleasantly surprised by the high standard of schools I visited, some in unpromising areas – tremendous ICT and other equipment, and lovely youngsters – a delight to be with. As it is not easy to address a hall full of youngsters below the age of 11 for half an hour, I am using the approach of analysing the coat of arms of the High Sheriff alongside the coat of arms of the town or city they live in. It amuses them that the High Sheriff has leeks on the badge around his neck and I have challenged them to create their own coats of arms, which my wife Connie and I will judge later.

There are a significant number of courts in the West Midlands with many High Court and other judges in regular attendance. It has been most enjoyable to entertain or be entertained by judges, nine times so far, with many more occasions to come. Judges' company is delightful and we are lucky that we are so well served by



Above: At Stephen Goldstein's Mad Hatter's Tea Party with the tallest man and the constable

them while they are under such a wide range of pressures.

The advice has stuck in my mind that to say 'thank you' is usually very well received. The efforts committed by volunteers are extraordinary and without their efforts many aspects of life we take for granted would collapse. I do try to say 'thank you' as often as I can.

One is presented as High Sheriff with far more charities and related events than one thought existed. The Mad Hatter's Tea Party organised by Stephen Goldstein CBE DL is a good example of the lengths to which volunteers go to help, in this case young people with a range of disabilities – they all enjoyed the day thoroughly and well over 500 youngsters attended. The best part was when I was asked by one starry-eyed boy which character I represented...

♣ **John Hudson OBE DL**
High Sheriff of West Midlands 2017-18



Attending the 100th anniversary of the award of the Victoria Cross to Thomas Barratt of Dudley, with Johnson Beharry VC and Richard Boot OBE DL