



## It's about those we meet

DID YOU have fun? What was the best bit? These are the two questions I am asked most about my time as High Sheriff.

My answer to the first question is an excited enthusiastic yes, but to emphasise 'fun' is perhaps to devalue a little the whole extraordinary experience. Instead, two adjectives could describe my year; it has been humbling and life-enhancing in equal measure. My answer to the second question needs explaining.

Five days before my Declaration ceremony, PC Keith Palmer was killed outside the Houses of Parliament. His death focused my mind very sharply on the largely unnamed, courageous, modest and selfless people who put their health and their lives in danger daily to keep us safe and our society glued together. My vow to myself, on the day I declared, was to try to meet as many PC Palmers as I could, from whichever path in the life of West Sussex they might come. Those in charge kindly made that possible. Sadly, three weeks before I took off my High Sheriff's hat for good, DS Nick Bailey became critically ill from nerve agent poisoning, another quiet hero 'just doing his job'. So it goes on, a rolling tide of events in the face of which, it seems to me, the expression of gratitude and encouragement becomes more and more important.

I spent many hours with the men and women of Sussex Police and West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service. We talked seriously and honestly, and laughed a lot. I was told much, shown much, and above all trusted; I'm profoundly grateful. The magistrates – unsung heroes all – and judges (who welcomed me across the 'border' in East Sussex) were unfailingly kind. The charities I encountered, big and small, moved me profoundly. Many beautiful and varied religious services brought welcome moments of stillness and time to reflect, dedicate and give thanks. The governors of the two Sussex prisons gave me generous chunks of time and facilitated access to staff and inmates. My contact with the Armed Forces was splendid; they were forgiving and patient with a rather nervous novice in matters such as medal-pinning! In every corner I've met kindness, gritty determination and dedication to doing good, often in the face of great difficulties. I've learnt so much.

To future High Sheriffs, I would say that the office is a special honour, and a weighty, worthy responsibility. It isn't about us. It is about those we meet, those we can encourage and those to whom we can say thank you. To be able to say these simple words, and in so saying make a difference – for it does – has been the greatest gift of the year for me.



Photo credit: Paul Archer on behalf of WSFRS

**Above:** With Firefighters Kevin Knight, Andy Grindlay and Chris Revell, Crew Manager Neil Davey and Watch Manager Paul Wykes  
**Below:** Sussex Police award ceremony at Arundel Castle

I have cut up a car, scrambled into the deepest recesses of a lifeboat, been driven at high speed with the police on 'blue lights', laid a wreath... I could go on. But my 'best bit', apart from the honour of meeting HM The Queen when she visited Chichester, has been the people I've met. They would all describe themselves as 'ordinary'. My goodness, they're not. West Sussex 'behind the scenes' – just amazing, and hurray for that!

### ◆ Emma Barnard

*The Lady Barnard, High Sheriff of West Sussex 2017-18*



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