



Diverse yet inclusive

THE INDUCTION process for High Sheriffs of the County and City of Bristol gets under way as soon as the appointment is in the public domain. The now established process is that the High Sheriff in office arranges a quarterly meeting with the two previous Sheriffs, the two in nomination, and the Under Sheriff. At these invaluable sessions the Sheriff presents the diary to date and other current issues are tabled. Consequently, those in waiting have some idea of what is to come in the first months and time to prepare how personal interests and passions might be planned around expected events.

A benefit of being a city High Sheriff is the access to immediate networks and events. During the lead-in it was helpful for me to establish close contacts with my counterparts in Somerset and Wiltshire as well as the Lord-Lieutenant and Lord Mayor.

As an established ambassador for Bristol as England's first UNESCO Learning City my personal campaigns – to promote social mobility in disadvantaged young people and to see that these young people have access to sports clubs to aid their development – could flourish. A surprise was that, when looking for support from agencies, associations, businesses and sporting bodies, saying you are the High Sheriff carries influence alongside responsibility. Respect though has to be earned! I am proud that through pulling agencies together we have taken some steps to reduce the number of children going hungry during school holidays. The Bristol Sheriff's Fund – raised through a major concert and appeals – is delivered through Bristol Youth Community Action and provides holiday activities for disadvantaged children in the arts, music and sport, and a camp in the countryside.

A highlight for my wife Mary and me was to fill Bristol Cathedral with a high-profile concert reflecting our Celtic (Cornish and Welsh) heritages. The headline act, the internationally acclaimed harpist Catrin Finch, excelled in her performance as did a local children's choir from underprivileged areas singing

Cornish folk songs with the well-known folk singer Steve Knightley. Follow-up primary school assemblies to thank the children provoked interesting questions about any age qualification to become a Sheriff and use of the sword!

Attending the Old Bailey gathering hosted by the London Sheriffs allowed me to meet City of London Sheriff Alderman Timothy Haines, a proud Bristolian, and then later to attend the award of his honorary degree in Bristol Cathedral. An out-of-county visit to Wiltshire saw that county's High Sheriff Nicky Albery addressing her guests from the footplate of a steam engine in a Swindon museum. Hosting and welcoming High Court Judges has led to stimulating conversations often well beyond legal matters. Invitations to high-profile military events at spectacular venues including the SS *Great Britain* seemed to occur with wonderful sunsets.

The colourful Jamaican Independence anniversary event; Gloucestershire Cricket Club hosting forty children from inner-city St Paul's at a T20 match; running a session for a youth group in challenging Knowle West on raising aspirations; seeing that an inner city adventure playground has supportive governance and a fence to keep out drug dealers and addicts – all these initiatives will long remain in the memory in this diverse and inclusive city.

♣ Roger Opie DL *High Sheriff of the City of Bristol 2018-19*

Clockwise from below:
Roger Opie with staff and volunteers at the Felix Road adventure playground in Easton, Bristol

Roger Opie DL welcomes guests to his Gala Charity Concert in Bristol Cathedral in aid of the High Sheriff's Fund to provide holiday activities for disadvantaged children

With Bristol's Lord Mayor supporting Alderman Timothy Hailes at his honorary degree ceremony

Celebrating Jamaican Independence Day

