



## Amazed by hard work

**THERE ARE many things which Oxfordshire, a very pleasant county, does not have. No coastline. No mountains. No major river, for the Oxfordshire Thames is, according to Matthew Arnold, a stripling. No tower to rival Blackpool's. No mines, whether of coal, tin or salt. And, for many years until May of this year, no Under Sheriff.**

There used to be one, a solicitor, and the baton was passed on every few years but then, amid a swirl of dark rumours, someone took the hump and the baton was dropped. Oxfordshire, however, does not deal in lost causes, and so the custom arose of the High Sheriff in nomination doubling as Under Sheriff for a year. The disadvantages of the arrangement are almost too obvious to be worth mentioning – the additional burden on both High Sheriff and their successors, the annual semi-reinvention of the wheel, etc. More menacingly it became known, so I understand, that the High Sheriffs' Association was 'not happy' about this and so 'something had to be done'.

Blissfully unaware of all this I went along in September 2018 to the High Sheriff's garden party. I was a little surprised to be invited since retired district judges, as I was, have tended to fall off the guest list. The High Sheriff can't possibly be expected to invite everyone. The small mystery was solved when I picked up a badge stating 'His Honour Michael Payne'. Retired circuit judges retain their title but ex-district judges revert to plain old Mr, Mrs, Ms or, I suppose, X. Someone had got me wrong. The badge had to be worn, of course, and this provoked a little merriment from former colleagues attending. It appears that I may have created legal history by being the first judge ever to be promoted after they have retired. One even suggested that I might make Lord Chief Justice by the time I was 90. It was this same fellow who asked if I might like to become the Under Sheriff – 'no more than



Lady Jay with Richard Venables (HS 2018-19), Patrick Eccles QC and Julian Hall, the immediate past and present Shrieval Remembrancers



The High Sheriff in conversation with a couple of police cadets

two hours per year, Michael'. How could I refuse? On two hours per year I think I am now well into the next century.

First thoughts: I am amazed at how hard the High Sheriffs work. Last year my county's carried out 344 appointments, including running a marathon. This year's, Sylvia Jay, may well come close to that total though without the marathon. She works tirelessly to support and assist the unsung heroes and heroines who try to help offenders to reintegrate into the community.

I am awed too by the generosity which is required of the High Sheriff and not just 'front of house' with events like the

garden party – Ditchley House this year, an astonishing pile – but 'back office' too; all those invitations, badges and so on don't make themselves. I am trying to work out whether this inevitably reduces the pool of possible future High Sheriffs in a way which is unhealthy for the future of the Shrievalty. If, having read this, the next High Sheriff in nomination for Oxfordshire is still minded to appoint me as her Under Sheriff and if the Editor permits, I may continue this theme.

◆ Michael Payne  
*Under Sheriff of Oxfordshire 2019*