



## Warwickshire's youth doing their bit



**WITH THE message from Burghley of 'hitting the ground with running' ringing in my ears, it was time to put into practice one of my two 'non-judicial' objectives for my year, namely 'Sowing the Seeds of Responsible Citizenship'. Quickly I came to the conclusion that the most fertile ground for my 'seeds' was to be found in Warwickshire's 42 state secondary schools and nine private secondary schools.**

The 'Sowing the Seeds' title was quickly condensed into 'Doing Your Bit' which, in turn, morphed into a 15-minute presentation, including some video footage; first, from the Walt Disney film Robin Hood which features the Sheriff of Nottingham (not Warwickshire I am pleased to say!) and gave me the basis for explaining the change in role of the High Sheriff; second, JFK's inauguration speech: 'Ask not what your country (county) can do for you – ask what you can do for your country (county)'. Four examples were then given of 'Doing Your Bit':

**Above:** Brickyard Barn, school for six pupils – note the hat on the up-and-coming High Sheriff on my left

attendance at the scene of an accident, a charity bike ride, pupils teaching pupils, and communication with elderly relatives. These were then used to engage pupils who talked of their own experiences in question and answer sessions after the assembly.

It soon became clear that, in Warwickshire at least, no previous High Sheriffs had particularly focused on the schools in the county; the result was that principals and staff and, most importantly, backroom staff were enthusiastic about the visits and there was much 'tweeting' by me after each visit together with a letter of thanks and appreciation to the relevant chair of governors.

I took two things away from this initiative (which is still ongoing); first, the extraordinary enthusiasm and youth of Warwickshire's teaching professionals, particularly as many of the visits were in the summer term when exam pressures are

at their highest and second, the quality and depth of Warwickshire's young people – in essence, in a year where there seemed to be much turmoil in so many spheres of the world, Warwickshire's schools are an remarkable example of hope for the future. I will never forget the 30ft plastic bottle model at Trinity Catholic School in Leamington Spa made from bottles discarded in one month by pupils at the school and rescued by two enterprising children – there to show the monolith that plastic can so quickly create.

Will I ever forget the sense of extraordinary achievement and determination for the future at Higham Lane School which moved from 'Good' to 'Outstanding' status?

To re-emphasise the importance of schools in the community, all principals from all the relevant schools were invited to attend my Shrieval Service at St Mary's Warwick, where the head girl of Higham Lane School read a prayer and an anthem was sung by the pupils of Warwick Prep School.

In March 2020 my High Sheriff's Awards evening will take place; each school has been asked to nominate an unsung hero, both adult and pupil, for recognition for their contribution to the school. In that way, a year that started focusing on Warwickshire's youth will end on focusing on Warwickshire's youth.

### ◆ Simon Miesegeas

*High Sheriff of Warwickshire 2019-20*



**Jane (35 years' service) Bonnie (29) and Dawn (21) – part of the catering team at Studley High School**