



# Cultivate the clerks

**AS WE organised the Christmas music festival at our local church I could never have envisaged what the new year would bring and that this would be my last organised event – I had so much planned for my last three months in office.**

Before Christmas, my Under Sheriff told me that Mrs Justice Jefford, Presiding Judge of the Wales Circuit, would sit at Mold Crown Court possibly in late January. At Burghley seminars, High Sheriffs in nomination are told that it is their responsibility to sit with visiting High Court Judges and to offer them hospitality. With a murder trial expected to last at least five weeks I needed to plan very carefully.

Fellow High Sheriffs finding themselves in this position should first make contact with the housekeepers of judges' lodgings who hold a wealth of knowledge about judges and their dates of arrival, which can be very flexible. Previous trials can finish early or be extended so shrieval plans have to be flexible to accommodate judges' very busy workload.

Once you have judges' names make contact with their clerks whose details you can obtain from HM Courts & Tribunals Service which also holds judges' itineraries. I cannot stress enough the

importance of contact with their clerks as they are everything in the day-to-day running of judges' lives and are privy to their likes, dislikes and dietary requirements – essential information when you plan entertain them.

Mrs Justice Jefford loves music and singing (she is of course Welsh) so I was fortunate that a mezzo-soprano friend agreed to sing at a large dinner party we held at Carden Park. We also arranged for the judge to enjoy the wonderful new spa facilities should her workload permit, and for me to sit with her as often as possible during the trial.

Whenever I sat with her at Mold Crown Court we lunched with the judges, whose unforgettable conversations gave me an insight into the legal world. There are no court catering facilities so I arranged for buffet lunches to be delivered, again with invaluable advice from judges' clerks. When planning evening entertainments it's important to remember that all guests must be present before the judge arrives and that the judge should be the first to leave.

As the date for the start of the murder trial approached I was advised by the HMCTS that the Lord Chief Justice Lord Burnett, Mr Justice Picken and Mr Justice Turner would sit at Mold Crown Court



The High Sheriff with Mrs Justice Jefford

in February to hear criminal appeals – so no pressure! I had enjoyed meeting Lord Burnett previously at the Legal Service at Bangor Cathedral.

With the help of Steve Thomas, Airbus Government Affairs Executive and High Sheriff in nomination 2021-22, I arranged dinner for the judges at the Airbus plant in Broughton, including a fascinating tour of the wing-building process. Unfortunately a delay prevented Lord Burnett and Sir Simon Picken from joining us at dinner, which was attended by Dame Nerys Jefford, Sir Mark Turner and David Peate, High Sheriff of Powys (which has no Crown Courts). The next morning at Mold Crown Court we received Lord Burnett and the High Court Judges, and after the formal introductions David Peate and I joined the judges during their deliberations of the criminal appeal hearings.

An informal lunch also gave the judges a chance to chat and meet the resident judge for North Wales, His Honour Judge Rowlands, and Deputy District Judge Julia Longworth.

I wonder if this has set a new record – simultaneous visits of the Lord Chief Justice, three High Court Judges and a neighbouring High Sheriff. It certainly was an unforgettable and informative experience and I am very grateful to Dame Nerys for spending time explaining the proceedings and details as the trial progressed.

**Stephanie Catherall**  
*High Sheriff of Clwyd 2019-20*



High Sheriff at Theatr Clwyd for International Women's Day with Syrian refugees (Flintshire is a designated 'City of Sanctuary' for asylum seekers and refugees)