



## Engaging not just broadcasting

**‘YOU’RE THE whatsit!’** Turning up as High Sheriff in court dress never failed to produce some sort of reaction, which in my case ranged from a curtsey, to being called ‘duck’ (not unusual in Derbyshire), and on one occasion ‘the whatsit’. Whatever the greeting, it would invariably be accompanied by smiles and a good deal of enthusiasm. But what I found interesting was that, while generally pigeonholed as a ‘Good Thing’, people often had only a vague notion about what the role entails.

And it dawned on me that this is a positive; because more often than not people had an idea of what they *wanted* the role to be, and in most cases I was more than happy to fulfil that wish. Being adaptable as to what the role entails, while maintaining its integrity, ensures the role can be relevant to any given situation – be that as speaker, listener, supporter, promoter, dance partner, or a combination of many things.

‘The most worthwhile thing is to try to put happiness into the lives of others,’ said Robert Baden-Powell. The sheer number of people making a positive difference throughout the county was perhaps what struck me most forcibly during the course of my year. However, the voluntary sector is not just a ‘nice to have’ – it forms a fundamental part of the very fabric of society and its significance will only increase with inevitable statutory cuts. On the positive side, there are proven benefits for the volunteer as well as the organisation, something I found to be very



**Above:** Abseiling from the tower of Derby Cathedral for Rainbows Hospice  
**Below:** Comprehensively out-dressed by a Powder Keg morris dancer at Edensor Day



**Below left:** With Carol Campbell, Michael Thomas and participants in the Aspire2 Derby mentoring project  
**Below right:** Training for 208 mile county boundary cycle ride for Derbyshire Community Foundation with world record-holder Leigh Timmis

much the case as High Sheriff. In fact, to such an extent that I started to worry; I was getting so much out of the role but what clear-cut benefit was I delivering, other than fundraising? It’s difficult to measure but I decided the best thing to do was to put my head down, work hard and let go of the need for tangible outcomes.

One tangible outcome I could measure was engagement via Twitter and Instagram. Using these tools is a way to quickly and easily raise awareness for good causes but by taking time to engage rather than merely broadcast, one creates an opportunity to try to keep the High Sheriff’s role relevant. Continuity (or lack of it) has often been cited as a problem with the role; passing the same social media accounts from one High Sheriff to the next creates an opportunity for some continuity to be maintained.

Like many others my last act as High Sheriff was to witness the installation of my successor via a Zoom video conference. The appearance on screen resembled that old TV programme *Celebrity Squares*, but with everyone fully dressed for their respective roles. It was somewhat surreal to be following such an ancient ceremony in such a contemporary fashion, though the loud ticking of a grandfather clock in one person’s home ensured the event wasn’t entirely removed from its traditional roots.

**William Burlington**  
*Earl of Burlington, High Sheriff of Derbyshire 2019-20*

