



## Leaving crime and violence behind

**MY FIRST official engagement as High Sheriff of Greater London last year got off to a false start. It was at Westminster Abbey for a commemorative event to mark the 100th anniversary of women serving in the Metropolitan Police Service. I had a numbered ticket so went into the Abbey, found my place and sat down. That was the mistake. An official lady soon came over to me and said: 'Mr High Sheriff! There's a reception committee waiting to welcome you in!' So out I went and came back in to be greeted by the Dean of Westminster, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Dame Cressida Dick and a group of other dignitaries.**

In a procession which included members of the Royal Family and members of the House of Lords, we

were led to our seats. I had invited a friend to accompany me and admit to being saddened on the day as she could no longer attend although I told her afterwards that her absence had allowed me to absorb the grandeur and honour of the office. I reflected on how a boy who had grown up in the troubled streets of south London with crime and violence all around, who had fallen into bad ways but had somehow managed to break out and away from those who went on to lead meaningless lives – I imagine often in prison – had now ended up here. For once, I felt proud of myself.

A boy born in an impoverished part of the most impoverished country in the world had been appointed by HM The Queen to be Greater London's figurehead in all matters relating to law and order.

The highlight of my year, as is common with many predecessors, was presenting awards to members of the public who had shown exceptional acts of bravery which resulted in people being caught and prosecuted for ghastly crimes. I was privileged to conduct one at the Supreme Court in the presence of the court's President, the wonderful Lady Hale, and the Lord-Lieutenant of London, the charismatic Sir Kenneth Olisa. I took as one of my guests a mentee of mine, Richard Asamoughia, who grew up in a council estate in south-east London where he was the only kid not to get sucked into drugs and gangs. He's now a motivational speaker in inner-city schools and will use the story of meeting the President of the Supreme Court as part of his narrative on the power of positive thinking and where it can get you. I am keen that the role of the High Sheriff spreads into all parts of London to make it a more socially inclusive role.

Such events take meticulous organising – not just to find a date where all the great and the good can be available, but also to write, phone, email and contact the awards recipients and their families, to have citations calligraphed, a reception organised and much more besides. My final act as High Sheriff is to thank wholeheartedly Lynn Johansen, the Under Sheriff of Greater London. I can't imagine the multiple of how much more time Lynn has taken to work behind the scenes than I took to work in front.

Liaising with the courts and prisons I wished to visit and ensuring that all protocols during my year were being observed was no small task either. Yet Lynn effortlessly managed to do all this with a constant smile on her face. I remain grateful to my predecessor five years back, Kevin McGrath DL, for nominating me for the role and to Lynn for making it such a seamless pleasure and honour.

**◆ Iqbal Wahhab OBE**  
*High Sheriff of Greater London 2019-20*



Photo: Susan Ellicott

Lady Hale and Richard Asamoughia at the Supreme Court