



Photo: Andrew Mandell

## Not just the hat

**Above:** A full hand of Sheriffs at the Judges' Service L to R: Sarah Le May (Hampshire), Paul Barrett (Kent), Bridget Biddell (Surrey), Davina Irwin-Clark (West Sussex), Violet Hancock (East Sussex)

**I** was looking forward to my evening with police cadets, witnessing their training. Would it be drill, practising arrests, or what? I knew I would be surprised and impressed. After introductions, the leader turned to me: 'Over to you, High Sheriff...' Ah. I was indeed surprised, with 100 minutes to fill, but with no reason to be impressed. I was glad of my 35 years as a vicar's wife; this was another youth group to galvanise, and happily lots of good discussion arises out of the swords of justice and mercy on the shrieval badge. Can there be too much justice? Can there be too much mercy? How do the police balance the two?

It was not the only time I reflected on that question. When sent out with Crawley police to a report of two men fighting, it turned out to be two teenage brothers both with special needs, one attempting to stop the other from self-harming. One minute the police might have had to be tough authority; the next, they are making caring enquiries of distressed parents. I will be a champion of the police for the rest of my life. I came away wobbly from listening to a 999 call where a violent drunk was using two whisky bottles to break everything he could in the house while his girlfriend and his mother cowered upstairs; the call handler, however, was the essence of reassuring calm and practicality: 'Please take the car keys into the bathroom with you...' And they do that every day.



Looking back, I can see that my year was shaped around three spiritual occasions: my Judges' Service in Worth Abbey; a Blue Light Service, with East Sussex, to honour the emergency services; and the presentation of High Sheriff's certificates within evensong in Chichester Cathedral. Very sadly this last was scuppered by COVID-19.

I wanted my Judges' Service to make the concept of law and order personal, so it centred round accounts from a serving police officer, a retired High Court Judge, and an ex-con. It was moving to hear how their faith motivates and equips them in their service of the community, and one could have heard the proverbial pin drop as Tom, a former drug dealer out of prison for only two years, told how his life has been transformed.

With the High Sheriff of East Sussex, I convened a 'Round Table' around the prisoner's journey from the dock to post-release. The resident judge, prison governor, and those from probation, magistracy, restorative justice and family support charities all made it a fascinating and worthwhile discussion with real improvements resulting.

Life as High Sheriff is frankly extraordinary. I have met people whose sacrificial lives are wholly inspiring. With my chaplain, whom I had the foresight to marry 40 years ago (!), I have laughed, cried, discussed and prayed, and learnt that the essence of a shrieval year is not how much you do, but how much you care. Those one meets on visits, either to statutory or charitable bodies, can tell immediately if the heart is present, or only the hat! My own heart has been expanded and warmed by so many I have met, and my gratitude knows no bounds.

### ◆◆ Davina Irwin-Clark

*High Sheriff of West Sussex 2019-20*



Photo: St Wilfrid's Hospice

The High Sheriff assisting in 'Jail and Bail', a fundraiser for St Wilfrid's Hospice at Amberley Castle, with 'prisoner' Karl Roberts and 'jailer' Chris Blatch-Gainey



Photo: Andrew Mardell

The 'Great and Good' outside Worth Abbey following the Judges' Service L to R: Penny Schofield, Chief Coroner for West Sussex, Paul Barrett (Kent), Violet Hancock (East Sussex), Pip Goring, wife of the Vice-Lord-Lieutenant of West Sussex, Harry Goring, Vice-Lord-Lieutenant of West Sussex, Mr Justice Andrew Edis, Davina Irwin-Clark (West Sussex), Revd Peter Irwin-Clark, Chaplain and Consort to the High Sheriff of West Sussex, Sara Stonor, Vice Lord-Lieutenant of East Sussex, Sarah Le May (Hampshire), Bridget Biddell (Surrey), with Judges of the South-Eastern Circuit



Photo: Andrew Mardell

Davina Irwin-Clark with Giles York QPM, Chief Constable of Sussex, and the police cadets and their trainers



Photo: Eddie Mitchell

The High Sheriffs of East and West Sussex with representatives of the emergency services at Lancing College, 20 February 2020 L to R: Caroline Lucas, County President, St John Ambulance; Dawn Whittaker, Chief Fire Officer, East Sussex; Fr Jim Horton, Chaplain to the High Sheriff of East Sussex; Violet Hancock, High Sheriff of East Sussex; Giles York QPM, Chief Constable of Sussex; Sabrina Cohen-Hatton, Chief Fire Officer, West Sussex; Revd Peter Irwin-Clark, Chaplain and Consort to the High Sheriff of West Sussex; Davina Irwin-Clark, High Sheriff of West Sussex; Tim Fellows, Operating Unit Manager for Brighton SECAMB; Mark Sawyer, Coxswain of the RNLI, Eastbourne