



Nothing normal

ON MARCH 15, in a break from recent custom, I made my Declaration as High Sheriff during the Durham Legal Service, held at Durham Cathedral. The service was attended by approximately 300: members of Her Majesty's judiciary and civic dignitaries, together with representatives of the emergency services and local charitable organisations, and friends and family. Little did any of us know how much COVID-19 was going to impact on all our lives and, within 48 hours of my taking office, cathedrals and churches throughout the United Kingdom were closed to public service and we started the lockdown procedure.

Clearly the role that I had intended to fulfil has been severely curtailed, with appointments planned for March, April and May postponed or cancelled but, following the freeing-up of movement in

England, I decided that I could at least try and raise some money for those in the front line of the fight against COVID-19 in County Durham, but perhaps not those who first come to mind.

Accordingly, I set up a fund with the County Durham Community Foundation which will not only provide assistance now but also a future source of funding to benefit organisations looking to help those less fortunate, particularly in respect of poverty and hunger, mental welfare and domestic abuse.

Having identified four local charities from different parts of the county, I undertook to walk the two main rivers, the Tees and the Wear. I started from the county boundary with Cumbria and travelled down to the estuary in Middlesbrough, along the coast to the mouth of the Wear in Sunderland and then up to its source on the county

boundary and finally over the watershed to where I had started. When I came up with the plan, we were in a very different place; nothing was normal although I managed to take more exercise than usual, but was still a couple of stone overweight – with a welded back as well as a wobbly knee, painful shoulder and a sore left foot! Limited company was allowed, with correct social distancing and I am pleased to report that the fundraising currently stands at just over £41,000.

The experience was fulfilling and the money will certainly make a difference to a significant number of people who are in desperate need. My focus is now on the next six months, with courts opening up and the opportunity to carry out a number of visits, so I hope that I will be able to perform some of the usual duties of the High Sheriff before my term comes to an end.

David Gray
High Sheriff of County Durham 2020-21



Durham Legal Service Left to right: Revd Paul Sweeting (High Sheriff's Chaplain); His Honour Judge Sloan QC, Hon Recorder of Newcastle; Chief Constable of Durham Jo Farrell; Lord-Lieutenant Mrs S Snowdon; David Gray, High Sheriff of County Durham; The Hon Mr Justice Goss; Assistant Chief Constable Steve Graham (Cleveland); Assistant Chief Constable Helen McMillan (Northumbria); John Robinson JP, chair of County Durham Magistrates; Nick Kincaid, President of Newcastle Law Society