



Time to SING

I DIDN'T expect, when becoming Under Sheriff for Oxfordshire a little more than a year ago, to be part of a meeting of getting on for 80 High Sheriffs and High Sheriffs in nomination, with a small sprinkling of Under Sheriffs, arranged with virtual and efficient aplomb by the High Sheriffs' Association last September. No bets on what's around the next corner. It was impossible not to be impressed – moved, even – by the innovation, energy and 'getonwithitism' shown by High Sheriffs up and down the land.

Oxfordshire's High Sheriff, Amanda Ponsonby, had her plans grievously thwarted. The county is of course well known for learning and car manufacture, but it is powered by agriculture too. Amanda had intended to infuse as many people as possible with Oxfordshire food and wine (the latter includes a pretty palatable sparkling). She had intended too to use her office to give a boost to underappreciated parts of the county. The city of Oxford is of course a gem – a vast number of tourists from the world over are there every August, but none of them go to Banbury, a fine, quirky town.

Not much of this could happen. Instead, like many other High Sheriffs, she spent the early months almost melting her telephone in introducing herself to everyone whom she had hoped, and still hopes, to meet. As restrictions eased she was able to get out and match faces to voices.

I may be wholly wrong, but it does seem to me that there is something solitary about the High Sheriff's role. They may be surrounded by kind and well-meaning folk but the responsibility for making a success of the role rests on a single pair of shoulders. Amanda has greatly valued her regular Zoom meetings with the other Thames Valley High Sheriffs and also her SING. This mellifluous acronym represents our Sheriff In Nomination Group, which consists of the High Sheriff, her two successors, the Shrieval Remembrancer, and me, and which meets three times in the year. It has for several years proved invaluable in supporting the High Sheriff and in assisting a smooth change in April.

By contrast, in Oxford, the principal town in Lafayette County, Mississippi, the Sheriff has 26 full-time deputies. This is fine, of course, but there is no escape after a single year. Sheriff F D 'Buddy' East held office from 1972 until his death in 2018. His son Joey was Oxford's Chief of Police concurrently, which might make some feel uncomfortable. But Joey is now the Sheriff so I suppose that's all right.

High Sheriffs, from my undershrieval perspective you have responded to the crisis magnificently, but still I fear that many of your plans have been shredded. I wonder if any of you have given any thought to agreeing to your name being put forward again in three or four years' time. Just a thought.

Michael Payne
Under Sheriff of Oxfordshire



High Sheriff Amanda Ponsonby and Tagore Ramoutar of the Oxford Artisan Distillery



Above: One of the main courtrooms in the Oxford Combined Court Centre for a SING meeting – not our usual comfy venue. Shrieval Remembrancer HH Patrick Eccles QC, the High Sheriff Amanda Ponsonby and Michael Payne, Under Sheriff

Below left: The High Sheriff with her Chaplain, the Revd Dr Stephen Blake, the Lord-Lieutenant Tim Stevenson OBE, the Deputy Lord Mayor, Mrs Justice Whipple and Judge Pringle

Below right: The High Sheriff presenting gloves to Judge Pringle, the Revd Philippa White, the Succentor beyond them



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