



Tales of the unexpected

WITH THE announcement of lockdown on 16 March it became clear that 2020-21 was likely to be a very different year for incoming High Sheriffs. Adapting to the new circumstances was going to be key, along with a certain amount of resilience and determination to serve, whatever the frustrations associated with the cancellation or postponement of long-planned events and the wholesale disruption to the civic calendar.

Like many other High Sheriffs this year my Declaration was via Zoom. This was my first real introduction to such platforms and subsequently they have proven vital in developing and maintaining connections and progressing projects.

So, first tip for my successors: become familiar and proficient with video-conferencing platforms as well as Instagram/Twitter.

My court dress has not had as many outings as anticipated thus far but I shall certainly remember the first after my Declaration. I was delighted to present an award to the wonderful Maggie Durston of Long Itchington, a volunteer for over 20 years with Warwickshire Vision Support in her lovely garden. It was a hot sunny day so I had taken off the dark blue velvet coat for the journey. As I leapt out of the car I found my movement curtailed by the prong on my waistcoat clasp which, being quite sharp, had buried itself into the seat back material. As I reached behind to release myself I cut myself on said clasp resulting in a bloodied hand and an unseemly kerfuffle on Maggie's drive – mercifully unseen by Maggie or her neighbours – involving one flustered, newly minted High Sheriff, one long-suffering consort, and many tissues.

My second tip therefore: expect the unexpected.

I also had the pleasure of presenting an award to the Maya Bar and Restaurant in Atherstone for their outstanding efforts under the Food4NHS initiative in providing hundreds of meals for NHS front-line workers at the George Eliot and Walsgrave (now University Hospital



Above: Presentation to Maya Bar and Restaurant
Left: The Zoom Declaration ceremony in April
Below: Presentation to Maggie Durston, volunteer for Warwickshire Vision Support



Coventry) Hospitals and for vulnerable local residents.

My theme for the year is 'employability' with a particular emphasis on apprenticeships and traineeships for those with special needs. The challenges facing the 16-24 age group in terms of education, training and employment have been made much more acute by COVID-19 and even more so for those with special needs. I am pleased to be working with Fay Winterburn of Warwickshire County Council and Claire Cookson of DFN Project Search on business engagement to try to increase training and job opportunities for this vulnerable group.

As I write there is talk of a second

wave and another lockdown. Despite the continuing uncertainty I can see the diary filling up with new and rescheduled meetings and events involving the judiciary, police, fire and emergency services, local charities. I shall also be presenting High Sheriff's Awards to deserving individuals and organisations: so many have gone the extra mile in the last six months.

Despite the challenges this is already proving to be a very fulfilling year in so many ways. I am expecting a very busy second half and I look forward to reporting on that in due course.

◆ Joe Greenwell CBE DL
High Sheriff of Warwickshire 2020-21