



## On with the feathers

**ALL THE best laid plans of mice, men and High Sheriffs were torn asunder last March with the introduction of the first lockdown. Declaration plans were thrown out of the window; I had planned to have mine at the RNLI Inshore Lifeboat Centre in East Cowes. This is where every inshore lifeboat in the RNLI fleet is built and maintained. As for so many of us it was back to the dining room table and Zoom. The beautiful file I had prepared was beginning to fill up – then nothing.**

However, there was urgent work to be done. My predecessor Geoff Underwood had put together an Isle of Wight Crisis Committee in conjunction with the Isle of Wight Council, the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Community Foundation, the High Sheriff's Trust and a couple of other local trusts. We swung into action almost immediately and had identified some core organisations that urgently



Let's Buy Local: with HM Lord-Lieutenant Susie Sheldon

needed help. Since we had the funds ready to distribute this was a life-saver, for instance, to many smaller groups which were doing vital work with food banks.

The Isle of Wight is very fortunate to have one county council and one Member of Parliament; it does make the job of High Sheriff much simpler. Our MP Bob Seely had immediately set up Zoom meetings with all the heads of organisations, of which I was lucky enough to be one. To start with these were held twice weekly and were incredibly helpful to find out where the 'bare' pockets were, and who needed help quickly. We were very proud to have been chosen for the pilot scheme for 'Test and Trace' though of course this didn't quite turn out as well as hoped since a lot of residents had older phones. There was also the drone scheme, taking medical supplies between a small airstrip on the Island and Southampton Airport.

My Lord-Lieutenant and I did commiserate about the thumb-twiddling we were doing but all along there were phone calls and Zooms, mainly to boost morale. As soon as lockdown was lifted it was on with the feathers and out and about giving Community Awards to those who had worked so hard to keep the small shops going as well as giving their customers first-class service. These were hugely appreciated.

Although visits to schools and most organisations were a no-no, I did manage one court appearance and also a visit to HMP Isle of Wight – which is in fact two prisons, Parkhurst and Albany.

The last three weeks of my year were spent presenting High Sheriff's Awards to young people who have achieved something, kept to the right side of the tracks, coped with family bereavements and so on. Last year these were Zoomed and a ceremony in the Minster in Newport had been planned. However, it soon became apparent that the restrictions would not allow this, so I did them individually. This has had the huge advantage of being able to talk to each recipient and their teachers or parents and hearing what their aspirations might be.

I am indebted to the support of the monthly Zoom calls and WhatsApps with the southwest High Sheriffs and the band of merry High Sheriffs I met on the speakers' course. We have laughed, commiserated and given each other a huge amount of moral support. Thank you all and I am looking forward to a meeting in person very soon.

◆ **Caroline Peel DL**  
*High Sheriff of the isle of Wight 2020-21*



Above: The Farm Shop: Jane and Kate Garnham with awards

Below: The Posse: the Island Riding Centre with the apprentices from HTP College and the instructors

