



## The Imaginary Ball – the greatest event you'll never go to!

DOUBTLESS LIKE all High Sheriffs during the pandemic, I had planned to do many things during my tenure and had to cancel them. Every time there appeared to be a slight possibility of initiating something an announcement meant the doors were closed. The reality was that an event or gathering of more than 15 people would not be possible.

The question became: How can I fundraise to be able to contribute to the many charities and organisations meeting the very real needs of people impacted by the pandemic but that need funds to enable their work to continue?

I initially planned to hold a Harvest Ball to celebrate all that was made in Suffolk and I gathered a team together. We thought creatively about what we were able to do and of the event we would love to hold; the seed was sown to create the greatest ball we would never go to – the Imaginary Ball.

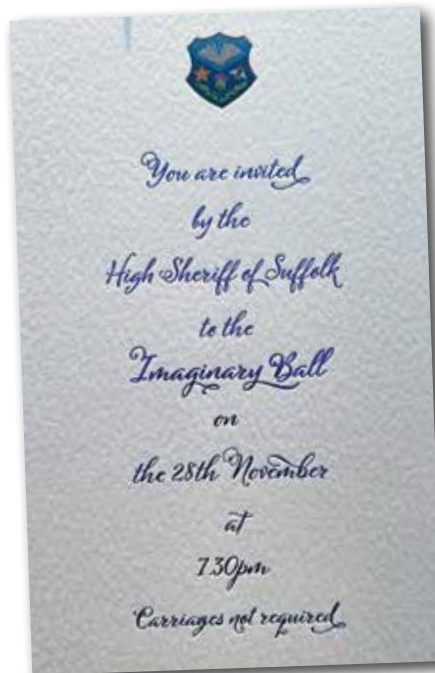
If we could dine with anyone from anywhere in the world, dead or alive, who would they be? At this Imaginary Ball we were able to do just that because it was all make-believe. We created a magnificent 12-course tasting menu, with a wine flight and Cristal champagne. We had music from Pavarotti, magic by Paul Daniels and Debbie McGee, and we invited people to dance the night away with a team from Strictly Come Dancing and the sounds of Benny Goodman and his band. Royalty attended and even Barack Obama joined from America.

We created the most stunning invitations which were sent to judges, barristers, politicians, business leaders, former High Sheriffs, colleagues, friends and family. Afterwards we received letters saying: 'I put this on my mantelpiece. It was the only exciting event I had in my diary for November.'

We asked people who received the invitation to donate via a JustGiving



Guests enjoying the Imaginary Ball: Bridget McIntyre top centre



page and we encouraged people to host a small party for the virtual event on 28 November 2020.

At the stage when the invitations were sent we weren't in lockdown and hoped groups of six would be able

meet in homes and enjoy a wonderful celebration. Sadly, in November, we went into a further lockdown and all the events planned became virtual. I was fortunate enough to have two virtual celebrations, one with friends locally and another with my family, many of whom live in America.

The result of all this was something to make people smile and, importantly, we raised enough money to be able to award 17 High Sheriff's grants to some amazing charities and organisations in Suffolk, supporting, for example, the Rickshaw Project, EPIC Dads, neighbour support schemes, Suffolk Rape Crisis, food banks and projects supporting young people.

An Imaginary Ball that never happened. Not something I would have expected to write about, but it illustrates how generous people are and how our role as High Sheriff can be done quite differently when needed.

◆ Bridget McIntyre MBE  
*High Sheriff of Suffolk 2020-21*