



Behind Bras

WHAT A roller coaster it was before Installation in 2021. Would it be Zoom? Would it be 'in real life'? In the end my Declaration ceremony took place discreetly at home in the garden in the presence of my (socially distanced) close family. As I read my Declaration from the top of the garden steps, I was amused to see my new and not yet met next-door neighbours arrive home and look with astonishment over the hedge. They looked totally perplexed at the Sunday morning fancy dress activity next door. Fortunately, I did not lose my place and my Queen's Commissioners were able to report that I had read my Declaration in full without errors.

The plans I had made in the preceding years had been rewritten several times in the light of the pandemic. In the end I made as many contacts as I could and for the first few weeks spoke to many people on the phone or on Zoom and was delighted when I was actually welcomed for 'in person' visits. Since April, the balance has changed considerably and I am pleased that I am now able to make actual visits on an almost daily basis.

The variety of invitations to the High Sheriff has been considerable. One of my first engagements was to attend an open-

air service to commemorate the 35th anniversary of Chernobyl hosted by the Bolton Ukrainian Association. The spine-tingling a cappella singing of the choir was truly memorable, despite the fact that they had been unable to rehearse together for months. In contrast, shortly afterwards we visited the Lancashire Mining Museum, run entirely by volunteers, and were privileged to drive the steam engine.

It has been illuminating to visit the four prisons within Greater Manchester together with HMP Styal which is just in Cheshire, so I made a joint visit with the High Sheriff of Cheshire. The outcome has been 'Behind Bras', which I have set up to collect new underwear for women prisoners as a short-term measure until their sewing unit can be reopened to employ prisoners to make bras and knickers which are currently in very short supply. This is being enthusiastically supported by Greater Manchester magistrates and also the staff at HMP Buckley Hall. I have been able to make connections for Buckley Hall to explore hospitality training within the prison to enable men about to be released to gain skills to help them find jobs.

The absolute highlight of my year so far was the visit of HM The Queen when I had the honour of welcoming her to Greater Manchester before Her Majesty was whisked off to the *Coronation Street* studios. Such a privilege to meet her before continuing my day by hosting all the Greater Manchester mayors for afternoon tea at Bibbys Farm, which is owned by Bolton Scout Trust and caters for the needs of over 20,000 visiting children each year. I am fortunate to chair the trust, which won the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in 2016 and is now seeking £750,000 to replace its Activity Barn.

The diary of a High Sheriff is one of enormous variety and contrast. There is a great deal to do and experience before April 2022!

◆ Diane Hawkins JP DL
High Sheriff of Greater Manchester 2021-22



Making my Declaration as High Sheriff at home



Entertaining Greater Manchester mayors at Bibbys Farm



Visiting Lancashire Mining Museum with husband Stephen



Visit of Her Majesty The Queen