



Less furtive and more normalised

AS WITH all other High Sheriffs of 2021 I had a slow start. On 20 March my Declaration ceremony went ahead amid consternation and concern. As a fully masked gathering of 30 people in the lofty nave of Hereford Cathedral it seemed somewhat unearthly and strange, but incredibly personal and with that perhaps even more special than the norm. With my long green velvet coat and broad hat with its feather, the addition of a matching mask gave the Sheriff an olde worlde vibe. Indeed, as we left the cathedral I heard a young boy exclaiming: ‘Look over there, mum, it’s Robin Hood!’

The year has ticked by and with that the COVID stress has decreased, and activity has become less furtive and more normalised. The COVID silver lining may have been that large gatherings have been abandoned so that smaller and more intimate presentations, meetings and interactions have been much more common. This has given me an opportunity to really get to know the people in the community.

And what an opportunity it is. I have worked all my married life on our estate in north-west Herefordshire which I took over from my father, so although always part of the wider Herefordshire community I was focussed on farming. Seeing a much greater and broader life has been such a privilege and truly humbling, and, although a cliché, I know all High Sheriffs



Photo: Sally Corrick

My Declaration at Hereford Cathedral with, left to right, Rt Revd Bishop of Hereford; Mrs Libhin Bromley JP; High Sheriff, Patricia Thomas High Sheriff 2020; His Honour Daniel Pearce-Higgins QC (Honorary Recorder of Hereford); Revd Andrew Mottran (High Sheriff’s Chaplain 2020); Revd Ben Griffiths (High Sheriff’s Chaplain 2021); Jeremy Wilding Under Sheriff, Herefordshire

of today would agree with me. Although I am not going to list the work I have seen – from the police to air ambulance; from the judiciary to the fire brigade; by charities of all shapes and sizes; by individuals and groups and volunteers sung and unsung – everything has been a pleasure. It has made me appreciate even more how very lucky I am to be part of the fabric of this part of England; and I take enormous, if slightly vicarious, pride in all of them.

I currently chair Visit Herefordshire so part of my work has been to carry this on promoting Herefordshire as a less visited treasure of the national tourism landscape. Alongside this, although I decided not to really have a ‘theme’ to my year, mental health is high on everyone’s agenda and has remained very much at the forefront

of mine, but there are too many charities and too much work going on in so many charity sectors that it would be churlish to ignore any of them.

High Sheriffs are becoming quite au fait with social media, including me! Although we had Twitter workshops prior to taking office, I find Instagram a more suitable medium alongside Facebook. Starting from scratch I now have over 1,000 followers. My audience is the Herefordshire general public, rather than the businesses and charities which already know about High Sheriffs, and in this I believe I have helped raise the profile of High Sheriffs in Herefordshire while showing engagement in local charity and the services.

I have also started a podcast where on a bi-weekly basis I interview interesting Herefordshire characters, representing a large diversity from the well-known (Dame Kate Bingham and Quentin Letts) to local people punching above their weight, such as vaccine clinic volunteers, police officers, 15-year-old St John Ambulance cadets, a Duchy farmer who founded a mental health charity (We Are Farming Minds), and COVID superheroes. Search ‘Bench Talk Jo Hilditch’ on any podcast platform.

Six months and counting... much more to come – can’t wait!

◆ **Joanna Hilditch DL**
High Sheriff of Herefordshire 2021-22



High Sheriff Jo Hilditch’s podcasts with Dame Kate Bingham and Quentin Letts