



A hidden iceberg

THE ROLE of High Sheriff dates back 1,000 years but, far from being antiquated, has never felt more relevant. The COVID pandemic has brought much pain and left countless scars. Dealing with the fallout – to health, education and the economy – is an enormous task. As High Sheriff, I am endeavouring to take a lead.

Tourism is an essential part of Shropshire's economy and was badly hit by lockdowns and restrictions. I have been working with Shropshire Council and promotional groups Visit Shropshire and Virtual Shropshire on a recovery strategy. I've had talks with MPs Owen Paterson and Daniel Kawczynski to take our case for funding to Westminster.

I set up a High Sheriff's schools' initiative to encourage students to think of local tourism. It was along the lines of Alan Sugar's *Apprentice*, where I set pupils the task of drawing up a tourism marketing plan to promote Shropshire. The feedback was hugely encouraging. Several schools took part, which delighted me as the aim was to engage young people in our tourism drive and take a pride in their county. My ambition on leaving office next April is to see Shropshire's tourism industry stronger than ever, with a sustainable framework that enables it to thrive for decades to come.

In the post-pandemic world, mental health is the 'hidden iceberg' in society. The past six months have shown me

the scale of the challenge. I have held talks on suicide, children's wellbeing, drug and alcohol abuse, and domestic violence. I have met a range of charities and organisations that offer crisis help and day-to-day counselling – and publicly championed their work – as well as talking to individuals about their own experiences. There is no doubt that tens of thousands of deaths, tough lockdown restrictions that separated families, the desperate isolation of people forced to shield alone, loss of livelihoods and many other factors, have damaged mental health. Many will need help.

I have championed our unsung heroes – police, firefighters, ambulance crews, doctors and nurses, charity workers and volunteers. I spoke at our annual 999 Day service at St Chad's Church, Shrewsbury on 9 September, at which we hosted Tom Scholes-Fogg, founder and Chief Executive of the UK's Emergency Services Day.

I've supported our Armed Services with tours of RAF Shawbury and the Army base at Donnington. And I've embraced the ceremonial side of my office, a highlight of which was meeting HRH The Princess Royal on her visit to Harper Adams University.

The local press has been very supportive – *Shropshire Magazine*, the county glossy publication, used my picture on its cover, and I've supplied several stories for our local daily and



With the inspirational Kelda Wood, whose Shropshire-based national charity Climbing Out rebuilds confidence, self-esteem and motivation in adults following a life-changing injury, illness or trauma



Presented to HRH The Princess Royal at Harper Adams University. Photo credit: Harper Adams University



High Sheriff promoting tourism at Bridgnorth Cliff Railway with (left to right) Cllr Sarah Barlow (Mayor, Bridgnorth); Dr Malvern Tipping (the railway's owner), Mrs Eileen Tipping (railway director), Cllr Karen Sawbridge (Deputy Mayor, Bridgnorth)



High Sheriff at the 999 Service with Anna Turner, Lord-Lieutenant, and Tom Scholes-Fogg, the national event's founder

Photo: Russell Davies Photography

weekly papers, promoting the role of High Sheriff, and also used social media to get my messages across. I've had approaching 100 engagements in the first six months and my wife Clare and our family have been wonderfully supportive.

Having 'zoomed' into office in April, it has been rewarding to play a part in the 'opening up' of the county as online meetings have gradually been replaced by in-person ones.

Anthony Morris-Eyton
High Sheriff of Shropshire 2021-22