



## A new skill learnt



Photo: de Vere Photography

Left: HRH The Prince of Wales granting City status to Southend-on-Sea; with HRH The Duchess of Cornwall and Mayor of Southend-on-Sea, Cllr Margaret Borton

**WITH THE** country still under lockdown, my Declaration took place in my garden last year on 12 April 2021 with only my Under Sheriff, Roger Brice, and Lorna Rolfe JP (Essex 2016-17) present. As it coincided with remembering the late HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, who had passed away three days earlier, we all wore black armbands and I offered my condolences to Her Majesty The Queen and the Royal Family after my Declaration.



With Andy Prophet, Deputy Chief Constable Essex Police, for the presentation of the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service to the Special Constabulary

Photo: Essex Police

My first official event was with our Lord-Lieutenant, Jennifer Tolhurst, at Chelmsford Cathedral, at an evensong in thanksgiving for the life and service of HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, where, masked up, with no singing allowed and only thirty people present, my year began.

As we slowly emerged from the Covid pandemic lockdowns there was a great deal of uncertainty among the voluntary sector. Some people were happy to meet up, often outside, others only on Zoom, schools were shut, councils were working from home and the police cadets were not functioning.

Due to the pandemic, I felt it was important to visit as many voluntary groups and charities as possible to thank them for their outstanding work during lockdown. My wife Emma and I were able to visit and connect with over 100 groups in between the lockdowns. All were doing fantastic work helping those most in need. After every visit we tweeted to raise awareness of them, and also to promote the role of the High Sheriff in my travels around the county. This was a new skill learnt and it would be a lost opportunity not to use Twitter to highlight issues and increase awareness.

My Justice Service in October was held at Chelmsford Cathedral two

days after the tragic murder of Sir David Amess MP, and we were able to offer some quiet reflection for those affected by this terrible event as well as prayers for him and his family.

As High Sheriff, I was invited to Sir David's memorial service in Southend and his funeral service the next day in Westminster Cathedral. Following on from this we were invited to join our Lord-Lieutenant for the visit to Southend by Their Royal Highnesses The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall to award Southend-on-Sea city status on behalf of Her Majesty The Queen – a day of both poignancy and celebration.

We were also privileged to support our Lord-Lieutenant for the presentation of the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service (QAVS) to the Essex Police Special Constables, some 530 sworn unpaid volunteers averaging more than 30 hours per officer per month in their spare time.

Because of Covid restrictions I was not able to visit our Crown Courts until July 2021 and our magistrates' courts until February 2022. It was disappointing not to have been able to engage more with the judiciary, but our judges and magistrates have done a tremendous job keeping courts open during the pandemic in buildings with holes in ceilings, heating systems not working and rusty radiators. I was successful in arranging for certificates to be presented to magistrates in recognition of 10 years' service. These were well received and have boosted morale.

It has been a great honour to serve the county of Essex as High Sheriff. The journey has been incredibly humbling and rewarding, and I wish my successor, Nicholas Alston, every success in his year ahead.

**◆ Simon Brice DL**  
High Sheriff of Essex 2021-22