



Turning the clock back

I WALKED into the St Albans Museum and saw a picture of myself, now consigned to history as the first black High Sheriff of Hertfordshire – not an accolade I aspired to but one I will live with.

In fact, I was pleasantly surprised as I executed the role during my year how the progressing diversity of the Shrievalty is gaining respect from not only people who 'look like me', but those from other minority ethnic backgrounds. One of my most memorable experiences was meeting a little black girl on one of my school visits, who raised her hand and asked 'Can women be High Sheriffs also?' I was delighted with not only the question, but the ability to say that indeed it was a woman that would follow on from me and others both before and in nomination behind her. The little girl smiled and I saw the aspiration rise within her. I'll never forget it, my admitted – and verging on monomania – pursuit that 'young people are leaders of today, not just tomorrow' coming alive.

Creating opportunities for young people to excel is something most of us can do and I found it enormously rewarding to launch a number of initiatives in my shrieval year that have, and will, continue to do this: young entrepreneurs creating opportunities for ex-prisoners, young magistrates encouraging their peers to take up this volunteering role, and other

initiatives to support or accelerate great practical citizenship. The testimonials continue to come in.

I was delighted to commission my teenage son John-Ellis to compose a shrieval Te Deum for our Justice Service, performed beautifully by the renowned St Albans Cathedral Choir on Sunday 21 November 2021. A rather close-to-home but nonetheless memorable example of planting an opportunity seed that allows young people to mature in their leadership and gifts. I do indeed wonder if we cannot learn some lessons from the past.

I took the advantage of using my possible relative, Nathaniel Wells – High Sheriff of Monmouthshire (1818), the acclaimed first black High Sheriff in



Lionel Wallace with Piercefield House in the distance



With the young people of One YMCA Hatfield

England and Wales – as a model of what youth diversity was like some 200 years ago. Born in St Kitts in 1779, he was educated in England, appointed a Deputy Lieutenant at age 24, a Justice of the Peace at age 26, and Sheriff at age 33. An increasingly fascinating character, he was the owner of Piercefield House, near Chepstow, which I managed to visit in court dress (courtesy of the High Sheriff of Gwent, Phillip Alderman) at the end of March 2022. It was truly great to see that even if we turn the clock back to the early 19th century, youth and diversity featured, interestingly without much comment.

The role of High Sheriff is as relevant today as it has ever been. An enormous privilege and honour, attracting interest from our young people in a way not even I had expected, though it was admittedly hard to distil how much their attraction to court dress was more about the sword than the jabot!

◆ Lionel Wallace DL
High Sheriff of Hertfordshire 2021-22



Photo: Mark Dalton

At the High Sheriff's Justice Service in St Albans Cathedral



Photo: Mark Dalton

Lionel Wallace at the High Sheriff's Awards evening with son John-Ellis Wallace