



Joy in bringing everyone together

BARELY HALF the shrieval year has passed and times have been momentous. Although we anticipated the joys and celebration of the Platinum Jubilee, no one expected the events which unfolded in September.

It was quite enough to have a new prime minister, turmoil in Europe and fears about an energy crisis, but all was swept away in a moment by the sudden death of our beloved Queen Elizabeth II. It was immediately clear that the meticulous planning and our nation's organisational skill and dignity would carry us through.

We saw the clearest evidence of what the Shrievalty and Lieutenancy reflects in our country and the way in which the regions fit into the national picture. If we hadn't quite realised how we should approach this job, the dedication and dignity of the Crown was right there in front of us, the best example of all.

My more comfortable round of supportive visits to the courts, regular police and fire service awards, discovering extraordinary dedicated charity volunteers, marvelling at factory processes, watching school children sing, dance and perform have all been unexpectedly wonderful. They are but a faint echo of the work of the sovereign. We have a bare year in office: The Late Queen had a matchless reign and her reach was national and global.

This outpouring of loyalty, appreciation, and devotion to our traditions has confirmed our trust in and admiration of the British people:

pragmatic, proud, stoic and sensible. It's a privilege and pleasure to serve them, even during this brief period in office.

Reflecting on my now distant Declaration, I was determined to hit the ground running, knowing how rapidly days would pass and knowing how hard it had been for my predecessors during lockdown. The direction was still uncertain but we had a packed service at my local church and a cheerful reception afterwards. Guidance and support from multiple High Sheriffs gave me confidence and I made early contact with blue light services and community leaders.

Courts had been my regular stamping ground as a barrister so the day after the Declaration we hosted a 'Law in Cheshire' event, bringing together key members of the county's legal system, building a sound contact base and a foundation of easy reciprocal relationships.

There have been so many events – celebrations for The Prince's Trust youngsters, charity visits organised by Cheshire Community Foundation, magistrates' swearing-in ceremonies, mayors' investitures and a wonderful burgeoning relationship with Chester Cathedral and the four major councils. Every minute has been valuable and I bless the time spent making individual connections.

I gave a garden party for all the county's mayors and civic chairs as soon as they were appointed creating a sound foundation of friendship for later events and inside local knowledge. I was happy to accept invitations from

local radio stations, to write pieces for local magazines and newspapers, to visit schools (the younger the class, the better the questions) – all great fun. I was blown away by technology at both North West Ambulance Hub and Police HQ, had a training day with the crew at Fire Central (training area for Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service) and walked the beat in Chester. I kept on tweeting and started to enjoy it enormously.

My fundraiser, Platinum Proms at Chester Cathedral in July, was compered by Gyles Brandreth, Chester's former MP and the chancellor of our university. (I serve on the university council, another great link throughout the county.)

The concert brought together a mass of regional talent which entertained a thousand guests. We raised the roof in a flag-waving finale, echoing the Jubilee spirit. It gave real insight into just how much joy there is in bringing everyone together, the strength of community and of national pride.

The summer continued – and what a glorious summer, driving through Cheshire and just being bowled over by the land and its beauty – with the County Show, the Nantwich Show, food festivals, opening village fêtes and carnivals, supporting charities at art exhibitions and lunches. It was a happy time, discovering more hidden gems in the county than I had ever realised existed.

I hosted two large garden parties for Ukrainian families and their Cheshire hosts, recognising Cheshire's compassion and generosity; friends rallied as bartenders and bakers. Next we intend to welcome our new Afghan and Hong Kong families; our community's kindness has been humbling.

Now, as the days shorten and the Legal Services come into play, I look forward to the next six months: can it possibly get any more interesting or rewarding?



Above: At the new ShareShop in Chester (Supporting Homeless Assisting Refugees Everywhere) **Above right:** Joining in with Fallen Angels, a dance troupe consisting of former drug and alcohol users and those who have suffered in abusive situations – clearly more training needed



◆ Jeannie France-Hayhurst
High Sheriff of Cheshire 2022-23