



Thank you, Ma'am

LIKE MANY of you reading this article I have known no other monarch. The Late Queen Elizabeth II has provided the canvass on which I have inked in a few wispy brush strokes since my inglorious arrival in 1958. As I watched my television transfixed, spellbound by the flawlessness of Her Majesty's state funeral on Monday 19 September, I reflected on the unforgettable impression she made on me when we last met in 1993. Her Majesty met millions of people in her long life and I was only one of many. Yet in the moment we shook hands I felt like I was the only person in the world who mattered. I was left dazzled and utterly speechless as she gave me her fullest attention.

As her Lord Chamberlain broke his wand of office and laid it on her coffin at the committal service in St George's Chapel, it suddenly dawned on me that our intake – the cohort of 2022 High Sheriffs – and sworn in only five months before, would be her last.

A walk-through of London Bridge was my first duty as High Sheriff: four days

after my Declaration. I little imagined it would be for real and so soon. Secretly we all hoped and prayed this day would never come. But now it has and the continuity of the Crown has been assured; it is as if I, and others like me, have helped in our own small way to place a reverential full stop on one of the greatest lives this realm has known in over a thousand years.

As an ex-serviceman I feel the loss personally. In 1977 and only a few weeks after Her Majesty's Silver Jubilee, I was sworn into the British Army and began preparing for Sandhurst. My first task was to repeat the Loyal Oath of Allegiance:

I do solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, her heirs and successors and that I will as in duty bound honestly and faithfully defend her Majesty, her heirs and successors in person, crown and dignity against all enemies and will observe and obey all orders of her Majesty, her heirs and successors and of the generals and officers set over me.



Re-enacting the visit by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II when she visited Hexham in 1974 to celebrate Hexham Abbey's 1300th anniversary (the previous reigning monarch to visit was Henry III in 1224)

As an impressionable 19-year-old it meant something and I have reflected on these words ever since. No wonder then that when I was collared in 2018 as a prospective High Sheriff I didn't give it a second thought. Fast forward to the historic and profound occasion of reading the Proclamation on the steps of Morpeth Town Hall on 11 September 2022 and I was overwhelmed by a wall of noise in response to my call for 'God Save The King'.

A crowd of 1,500 people responded in voluminous and perfect unity 'God Save The King'. That noise will stay with me forever.

Like all High Sheriffs everywhere life in Northumberland has been incredibly busy meeting so many interesting people. But my most iconic moment by far to date was to provide a royal guard for Elizabeth – playing her royal namesake – in a re-enactment of Her Late Majesty's visit to Hexham in 1974. To the sound of drums and the Town Crier, the heroes and volunteers of a Hexham charity, Gateway into the Community, paraded in the Market Place on Saturday 24 September 2022.

Thank you, Ma'am, fare thee well and rest in peace.

God Save The King.

◆ James Royds TD

High Sheriff of Northumberland 2022-23



Meeting Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II when she opened new law courts in Bedlington in 1993