



Thank, convene and connect

I HAVE been described as a fairy-story character when in costume – one of the Grimm ones, given our historical role. The recent royal succession has shown that we are a small part of the pageant and there are characters in it far more colourful – some with actual wands.

All has changed with the death of Queen Elizabeth II – and yet all has stayed the same. That is part of the magic of myth; there is comfort in archaic roles, rituals and continuity.

According to Yuval Noah Harari in *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, it is that shared belief in myths which supports all the structures and keeps society together, and that would include law and order.

Beyond the costume, the superpower the High Sheriff wields is in the simple 'thank you'. Whether to paid public servants or to volunteers, it carries real weight when backed by the heritage of the role and the representative power of the sovereign.

Our late sovereign held true to 'Faith, Hope and Charity', the three great Christian virtues which I find motivate volunteers in some of our cutting-edge services – community centres, community groceries and prisoner rehabilitation.

Faith, Hope and Charity, a book by Andy Wood, looks at society in the harsh years of the early 17th century. He quotes an epitaph: 'Charity with us grows cold / Worse in this age than twas of old.' A common trope then as now.

'Ah neighbourhood, neighbourhood, dead and buried art thou with Robin Hood,' lamented the poet and playwright Thomas Nashe in 1592 – noting in passing the reference to the bête noire of High Sheriffs. Yet the spirit of neighbourliness did survive and that should give us reassurance as we face a bleak end to this year.

King Charles III intends consistency and continuity, mirroring the view I have of how the impact of the High Sheriff can be increased. With only

12 months, limited resources and no actual power, I did not expect to change the world (and will meet that expectation). However, the power within the mantra: 'Thank, Convene and Connect' has highlighted some areas where a difference can be made.

Working in concert with others: High Sheriffs all face similar problems but with different outlooks. I have found the opportunity to partner with my colleague in Surrey to leverage connections to have an impact in both our counties.

Raising relevant profile: This doesn't require grand gestures. The Late Queen said, quoting Mother Teresa, 'Do small things with great love.' People remember being thanked, remember you turning up, or making a connection you promised. That builds a consistent profile.

Linking initiatives: An oral history project emerging from therapeutic work with recent veterans is building on work done arising from Coventry's year as UK City of Culture – one that will have impact beyond my shrieval year.

Delegation: A frustration is not being able to be in two places at one time. My proudest moment has been when my son laid a wreath at the rededicated grave of a Victoria Cross recipient, part of a ceremony made possible by the work of very committed volunteers recognising an individual who was no older than my son when he won the honour.

An image I saw from the copious but compelling coverage around both the Jubilee and the funeral of Her Majesty The Queen resonated in its capture of the close collaboration of the voluntary and professional public services: members of the Scouts, Police and St John Ambulance working to hold back the crowds at George VI's Coronation.

History has much to teach us.



At my Declaration with Police Cadets in the Chapel of St James at the Lord Leycester Hospital, Warwick



Tobias Kelham (second from left) at rededication of the grave for Cpl Amey VC MM in Leamington Spa

David Kelham
High Sheriff of Warwickshire 2022-23