

Polish Presidents and Sherwood Oak

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High Sheriff of Nottinghamshire 2022-23

It has been an honour to have been involved in many of the engagements I attended in my year as High Sheriff. Of course, matters surrounding the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the Proclamation of the Accession of King Charles III stand out as matters of great significance.

Also of significance were events surrounding the disinterment and repatriation of the remains of three Polish presidents-in-exile, with which I was involved by the kind invitation of the Polish Ambassador to the UK.

The Presidents of the Second Polish Republic in Exile preserved constitutional continuity and the integrity of the Republic from the September 1939 invasion, through the war and subsequent Soviet occupation until the first free presidential elections in 1990. The first three presidents-in-exile held office from 1939 until 1979 and were buried in the Polish Air Force cemetery in Newark, Nottinghamshire. After a Requiem Mass and ceremonies broadcast live on Polish television, their remains were repatriated to be buried in the new Mausoleum of the Presidents of the Republic of Poland in Warsaw.

Just before my year ended, alongside a county delegation, I visited the residence of the US Ambassador to the UK for a special ceremony. Winfield House was built for the American heiress Barbara Woolworth Hutton, who – for the token price of one dollar – gave the property to the US government to be used as the official residence of the Ambassador of the United States to the Court of St James's. The property stands adjacent to The Regent's Park and has the second largest private garden in London after Buckingham Palace.

To support Nottinghamshire's relationship with the US Embassy and Ambassador, we wished to make an appropriate and lasting gesture of friendship. Nottinghamshire is famous for its forests and trees, so we presented a sapling of a Sherwood Oak grown from an acorn of the Major Oak (Robin Hood's tree), and a sapling of a Bramley apple cloned from the original Bramley seedling, which remains alive (just) in Southwell, Nottinghamshire. The oak was donated by the Sherwood Forest Trust, and the apple by Nottingham Trent University.

At a planting ceremony (using a golden spade with a shaft of wood taken from the White House), the Bramley was placed adjacent to a fruit tree planted by Michelle Obama, and the oak in an open clearing. Later, photographs were taken of me standing in front of a painting of George Washington, as it had been noted that my shrieval uniform was remarkably similar to his 18th-century attire! I was invited to sign the visitor book as High Sheriff and was honoured to leave my mark in the company of The Queen, The King (as Prince of Wales at the time), Presidents George W Bush, Obama, Trump and Biden, and many others of note.

In my last few weeks, the county was privileged to receive its third royal visitor of the year, HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, on a visit to Portland College near Mansfield – a specialist college and Centre of Excellence for Autism, and a provider of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. I thought it hugely impressive that amid a busy schedule Prince Edward was able to find time for a friendly word with everyone.

Above right: With Matthew Palmer (Deputy Chief of Mission at the US Embassy London) in front of a painting of President George Washington at Winfield House

Right: The coffins of Polish Presidents-in-Exile Władysław Raczkiewicz, August Zaleski and Stanisław Ostrowski at St Mary Magdalene Church, Newark



With wife Sandi Henson, Dr Patrick Candler (CEO of the Sherwood Forest Trust), Cllr Roger Jackson (Chair of Nottinghamshire County Council), Matthew Palmer (Deputy Chief of Mission at the US Embassy London) and Cynthia Guven (Counselor for Agricultural Affairs at the US Embassy in London) planting a sapling of the Major Oak at Winfield House