

Contentment, friendship and lasting impact

Mark Beard

High Sheriff of Oxfordshire 2022-23

Like many other High Sheriffs my year started with the usual questions: What does a High Sheriff do? How are you appointed? And occasionally: How much are you paid?

The year ended with two very different questions: How do you feel about stepping down as High Sheriff? What are you going to do next?

I have had a varied and an extremely enjoyable year as High Sheriff of Oxfordshire. I have thrown myself into as many opportunities as I could, meeting some amazing, committed people and deep down I am content that I have done my best and it is now time for Sally Scott to take on the role.

From the day I committed to the role, I have felt the friendship, support and straightforward guidance from the Lord-Lieutenant, past High Sheriffs and others. After every interaction, I left feeling they wanted me to win. The best advice I received was from my immediate predecessor Imam Monwar Hussain: Mark, just be yourself.

The theme of my year was 'supporting young people from challenged backgrounds' and I held two workshops – at the Wood Centre in Oxford and the town hall in Banbury – where charities and businesses came together to share ideas. I raised just under £200,000 for my three charities: Active Oxfordshire, Children Heard and Seen, and Youth Challenge Oxfordshire, my last event being a wine tasting, coupled with local Oxfordshire produce and an auction led by Charlie Ross at St John's College.



With a group of High Sheriff's Award winners at Somerville College

A perfect combination to facilitate guests emptying their bank accounts.

I was delighted to hold my High Sheriff's Awards at Somerville College in Oxford. The sole focus of these awards was charities, schools and individuals who had supported young people. I made 21 awards and where possible supplemented the awards with a small financial thank you (from Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner) linked to their own charity.

During the second half of my shrieval year, my initial contact with the police, prison governors and judiciary turned into much stronger relationships. I was very pleased to be on the final interview panel for the new Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police, Jason Hogg, to give out many awards to our courageous police officers, to extremely committed prison officers and to sit in Oxford Combined Court with His Honour Judge Pringle and others on many occasions.

I was thrilled to bring back the Law Lecture – originally introduced by High

Sheriff Ian Laing – after a two-year lapse due to Covid. The 2022 lecture was delivered by Sir Robert Buckland KBE KC, previous Lord Chancellor. I believe this was the first lecture delivered by a sitting cabinet minister on the same day as attending a cabinet meeting. I am delighted that my successor has also chosen a sitting cabinet minister to deliver the 2023 Law Lecture.

I look forward to working more closely over the coming years with my chosen charities and others that support young people in our county. I am thrilled to have become patron of Activate Rugby Academy.

My selfish hope is that a few of the initiatives that I started will grow and make a lasting impact in our county. My wider and deeper hope is that we move to a society where all young people have a good chance of living a satisfying life.

Thank you to everyone who has made my shrieval year such an enjoyable time in my life.

Photo: Nicholas Posner

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At the 2023 Varsity Match at Twickenham with boys from Activate Rugby Academy

Michael Payne Obituary

It is with great sadness that I have to advise that the former Under Sheriff of Oxfordshire, Michael Payne, passed away in December of last year after a long illness, and I should like now to say a few words in tribute to him and to the work he has done for the Shrievalty of Oxfordshire.

Michael served for just under four years as Under Sheriff, supporting four High Sheriffs. He was a fount of knowledge and the first to put his hand up if a job needed doing, which he would do promptly and completely.

Michael enjoyed attending shrieval events on behalf of his various High Sheriffs and more than once said to me that being Under Sheriff kept him sharp and more than a match for his fellow retired judges, who were not lucky enough to have this later life opportunity.

Above all Michael was great fun, particularly when he was trying to explain away another defeat of his beloved Manchester United.

Michael is succeeded by his wife Vivienne, always a great supporter of the Shrievalty.