

Spirit, dedication and commitment

Ben Robinson MBE BEM DL

High Sheriff of Staffordshire 2022-23

My shrieval year came to an end on 4 April when I handed over the reins of this historic office to my successor, Victoria Hawley.

My 12 months started with Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and a Jubilee and, after the sad loss of Her Majesty The Queen, the commencement of a new era under King Charles III.

During my time in office I have worked with many remarkable organisations – and many inspirational people – councillors and officers in the courts, the fire service, the police and the prisons and I will always remember their amazing spirit and dedication.

I have been extremely fortunate to meet everyday people from all corners of Staffordshire who give up so much of their time and put in tremendous effort day in and day out to work tirelessly to make a real difference to countless lives, striving for the benefit of the communities they serve and seeking nothing in return.

It has been an honour to join the long and venerable line of previous High Sheriffs and I have learnt a lot about the history of the Office and the great traditions associated with it and how it can be traced back more than 1,000 years to the reign of the Saxon King Ethelred 'the Unready' – I have had to explain on many occasions why he was referred to as 'Unready!' But there is also evidence that it goes as far back as 669 to King Egbert of Kent who sent his Reeve Redfrid to Paris to escort Theodore of Tarsus back to Canterbury to take office as Archbishop. It was also interesting to discover that Queen Victoria decided that she did not want her High Sheriffs to be confused with her court

jesters so during her reign she changed the High Sheriffs' dress code from bright reds to a more subtle dark and gold.

Staffordshire is home to many treasured landmarks including Lichfield Cathedral – which is the only medieval three-spired cathedral in the UK – and the National Memorial Arboretum, a 150-acre site on the edge of the National Forest. Both welcome thousands of visitors a year and I have been privileged to attend a wide range of joyful, happy, poignant and emotional events at each venue.

There have been many things that stand out during the year but most notable was the depth of feeling for Her Majesty The Queen at the Remembrance Service at Lichfield which came so soon after the lighting of the beacons for her Jubilee.

There are eight prisons in Staffordshire and I have had the opportunity to visit five of them with my chaplain. I have

been inspired by the fantastic work that all the prisons are undertaking and particularly how they work hard to prepare prisoners for the time when they return to society. Werrington Young Offenders Institution houses 57 15- to 18-year-olds and operates a Restart Dog Programme which sees dogs being trained and raised to become autism support dogs; the process trains the young men to become dog handlers. Stafford, Dovegate and Drakenhall all operate successful industrious workshops including cutting plastic lenses for spectacles to be supplied to 80 prisons all over the UK and supplying items for DIY stores.

It has been a humbling and rewarding year engaging with so many amazing and selfless people across the wonderful county of Staffordshire. My heartfelt gratitude and thanks go to everyone I have worked with and met.



Above: Welcoming six new magistrates at Stafford Crown Court with Ian Dudson CBE (Lord-Lieutenant), HH Judge Kristina Montgomery QC and Alan Jones JP (Bench Chair for Staffordshire)

Below: With dignitaries and guests attending an evening of celebration for vaccination volunteers at the Pirelli Stadium; present were Cllr Philip Hudson and Karen Hudson (Mayor and Mayoress of East Staffordshire), Kate Kniveton (MP for Burton), Ian Dudson CBE (Lord-Lieutenant)

