

Challenging health inequalities

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High Sheriff of Merseyside 2023-24

My shrieval year got off to a flying start with the installation of the Right Reverend Dr John Perumbalath as new Bishop of Liverpool. This took place an hour after my own Declaration which was held at The Spine, the new Royal College of Physicians building in Liverpool. It is modern with magnificent views across Merseyside, providing a sharp contrast to the ancient Declaration ceremony.

Four days later Their Majesties King Charles and Queen Camilla visited the set for the Eurovision Song Contest. They, along with Olena Zelenska, the First Lady of Ukraine (who joined virtually), formally declared the Central Library twinned with Odesa Regional Scientific Library.

Two more royal visits followed in quick succession. His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Edward, opened the Shakespeare North Playhouse in Prescot and Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal attended the *Battle of the Atlantic* 80th anniversary in late May, opening a commemorative garden in Liverpool Parish Church and noting the key role that Merseyside played during the war. It was a marvellous weekend with a number of ships in the docks and a substantial presence of Armed Forces and equipment on display for the public. It was a particular pleasure to meet the veterans.

I held a mayoral reception for the five mayors of Merseyside at The Mansion House, Calderstones Park, Liverpool, in June. It is the headquarters of The Reader Charity (I am a trustee). Staff

talked about their impressive work in delivering 'shared reading' across the UK and especially in prison and probations settings where it has been shown to have great positive impact on wellbeing.

My theme for the year is 'Health Inequalities', the roots of which lie in disadvantaged social circumstances. I have visited organisations that are making a difference to children and young people; those supporting adults who are vulnerable through domestic abuse, addiction, mental health issues, etc.; and others helping people cope with the cost-of-living crisis. The need is great but the generosity and humanity I have seen is immense. Efforts to support young people such as through the Prince's Trust Programme delivered by Merseyside Fire & Rescue, the Merseyside Police and the Merseyside Scouts adventure weekend are commendable. The importance of volunteers is evident in all these activities.

There have been so many highlights already. A trip on the River Mersey with the Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service, accompanied by my Police Cadets, revealed how much they do to save lives on water as well as on land. I have also presented awards at an HM Coastguards event for the work they do along with the RNLI.

Long service awards are an important way to acknowledge dedication. I have presented them to staff at Merseyside Police and Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service, and 50-years' service awards to Girl Guide leaders – showing them my 50-year-old+ 'camp blanket' complete with badges, kept from my guiding days.



HRH The Princess Royal with the Revd Dr Crispin Pailing, Rector of Liverpool at the 80th anniversary of the *Battle of the Atlantic*

Finally, I presented my first High Sheriff's Award to a very impressive young man. When he was 14 years old he decided to do something about the fly tipping near his house. In two short years he has transformed the derelict space into a community garden, formed a Community Interest Company to run it and organises volunteers to look after it.

The diary is filling up and the challenge is to fit in all the things I hope to achieve before the year passes by all too quickly.

Below: With their Majesties King Charles and Queen Camilla, Cllr Roy Gladden (Lord Mayor of Liverpool), Mrs Gladden and Mark Blundell (Lord-Lieutenant)



With High Sheriff's Police Cadets Ben Shoebridge and Sophia Dennett



Presenting Khan Odita with a High Sheriff's Award at his community garden in Toxteth

