

# Infinite and wonderful variety

## Diana Barkes

High Sheriff of Northumberland 2023-24

When I took on the role of High Sheriff in April, I knew that I would spend much of my year meeting people in the voluntary and charitable sectors, as well as connecting with those employed in the judicial system and our blue light services. This has indeed come to pass, and I have – no doubt like High Sheriffs countrywide – met numerous people who go above and beyond in keeping us safe and giving of their time to support vital charitable organisations. However, I have been constantly surprised

by the wide range of events at which these meetings have taken place, and the infinite and wonderful variety of the people and communities of Northumberland.

I started off my shrieval year attending a Dialogue Society iftar and diversity dinner in Blyth during Ramadan where I was given not only the warmest of welcomes, but the most delicious feast. Wonderful and varied meals have continued, including a sumptuous fundraising Coronation tea, a picnic in a park, a barbecue in a barn, and lunch in HMP Northumberland cooked by the prisoners themselves as part of a rehabilitation project.

Of course, Northumberland itself is a county of topographical variety, with its long coastline, many former mining towns and villages, extensive farmland as well as beautiful and remote uplands. My trusty satnav has taken me to many new places: I spent one gloriously sunny day in June on the northeast coast for the opening of a sculpture trail by HRH the Duke of Gloucester at Amble, and the same evening was meeting the team at Allendale Fire Station in the extreme southwest of the county.

Commemorative events have ranged from the Flodden Day celebrations, in which a cavalcade of horses and riders left Coldstream in the Scottish Borders and arrived at Branxton Hill in Northumberland for a service marking the anniversary of the eponymous battle, to a very different service of commemoration held in Woodhorn Museum, a mining museum in Ashington, remembering all those who had lost their lives in the mines. I was back in Ashington a few weeks later at the invitation of the charity Northumberland County of Sanctuary, where I met refugees and heard how they had been supported by its volunteers.

Among many new faces, there have been those that have become familiar. The Right Reverend Dr Helen-Ann Hartley also embarked on her new role in April, when she was installed as Bishop of Newcastle at a superb service. We have since met at events as diverse as the service for the Coronation in Hexham Abbey to the Northumberland County Show, where we both took part in the opening ceremony along with Lord-Lieutenant the Duchess of Northumberland. Another 'new girl in town' back in April was Vanessa Jardine, who took on the role of Chief Constable a few days before my Declaration. She was kind enough to make time in her busy schedule to arrange a meeting between us where we discussed the challenges facing the police in the region. I have spent time out both with the rural police and on the water with the marine police, and I am looking forward to attending the Pride in Policing awards ceremony in a few weeks.

Having spent a fascinating six months meeting so many remarkable people serving their communities, I am looking forward to the next six months which I hope will be as interesting and rewarding as the first.



Above: With station manager Kevin Knox at Berwick upon Tweed Lifeboat Station  
Above right: With Julian Thomson, Alison Orgill and Fred Wyrley-Birch, directors of Anderson & Garland Auctioneers, at the private view of their July sale which raised money for the Northumberland High Sheriff's Fund

Below: The formal wreath-laying at the Ashington Miners' Memorial was followed by a quick outfit change for the annual Northumberland Miners' Picnic

Below right: The cavalcade arriving at Branxton Hill before the *Battle of Flodden* commemorative service

