

Commencing a really useful dialogue



Presenting a High Sheriff's Award in York Minster to Graeme Robertson for an outstanding 50 years' service to York Talking News – just one among an astonishing number of voluntary roles, including 20 years as a guide at York Minster

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High Sheriff of North Yorkshire 2023-24

Although everyone keeps saying to me that I must feel my year as High Sheriff has flown by, I have to reply that I do not feel that way. There is so much to reflect on. I have met so many fabulous people and had so many incredible experiences that it seems impossible that only one year has passed since my Declaration.

Looking back to the beginning of the year, we held a garden party in the sunshine to celebrate His Majesty's Coronation and, incredibly, having to relay the almost 400 people by taxi from the village due to the bog in the parking field did not seem to dampen spirits. I have been very gratified to hear subsequently of the many beneficial connections that were made that day. Making such connections is one of the great opportunities of the role and this continued through various social events and also with an evening introducing members of the judiciary to several charities working in the area of domestic violence. That particular evening commenced a really useful dialogue which is now set to continue.

My year was, to some extent, modelled by the dual themes that I had set for it. The first of these – in view of their strained relations with the public – was to support the police. I sought throughout the year to understand policing in the county by



In the custody suite, North Yorkshire Police

visiting many and various aspects of the work of both North Yorkshire and Cleveland police forces. At the same time, I did my best to encourage a better understanding in the wider community through the various talks and speeches that I made. I was pleased to be able to facilitate a day at Harrogate Police Station for IDAS, a charity supporting victims of domestic violence. This day is set to be replicated. I was so particularly proud that the Cleveland Police Cadets were Highly Commended at the National Crimebeat Awards.

My second theme was to encourage those charities which use creativity as a therapeutic tool. As a painter myself, this is particularly close to my heart and I know, at a time of such severe mental health challenges, what an enormous difference this work can make. It has been wonderful to meet so many inspiring people who encourage others to find a way through their difficulties by being creative. Together with the Two Ridings Community Foundation, we held a photographic competition, inviting charities to submit photographs which they felt best represented the work that



Declaring the result of the Selby and Ainsty by-election

they do. This raised some vital funds for the charities and was a joyful experience for everyone involved. It is clear that getting people to gather together to do an activity – whether photography, painting, gardening, music or dance – is key to improving how people feel about life.

With an election in sight, I must also say how much I enjoyed being the returning officer for the Selby and Ainsty by-election. I would encourage all High Sheriffs to take up this part of the role if they can. It was so fascinating to see our democratic process at work and to feel the weight of history as the sheets of paper marked with a cross are counted.

Finally, it is such a joy to be able to present High Sheriff's Awards and in this way to give recognition to the thoroughly deserving people in our communities. It is an honour and an extremely humbling experience to meet so many such people and I am very grateful to have had this incredible opportunity.



At Pioneer Projects, Bentham, a community-based arts and health charity Photo: James Drury Photography