

# Scratching the surface



On the *Medway Queen* for the 100th birthday of the paddle steamer following restoration (she and her crew rescued over 7,000 from Dunkirk). With sea cadets, the Very Revd Dr Philip Hesketh (Dean of Rochester Cathedral), The Lady Colgrain (Lord-Lieutenant), Admiral Lord West, Cllr Nina Gurung (Mayor of Medway) and Mr Gurung

## Dr Gill Fargher

High Sheriff of Kent 2024-25

I became High Sheriff of Kent in early April 2024 in the magnificent and historic surroundings of Rochester Cathedral in the presence of my distinguished guests – a very special day.

I am a former GP and have lived and worked in Kent for 41 years. Conscious of the advice to 'hit the ground running' and 'do it your way' I spent a significant amount of time preparing for my shrieval year. I am fortunate to have retired from clinical practice so was able to meet key personnel, secure dates for the Justice Service and my garden party, and listened to and learned from former High Sheriffs, who are, without exception, invaluable. I participated in every event offered by the High Sheriffs' Association of England and Wales.

Kent is a big county with a population of over 180,000, has two cathedrals, two Crown Courts, seven prisons, and over

4,000 charities. Undoubtedly, despite my good intentions, I know I will only scratch the surface.

I have been especially lucky that there are a number of special anniversaries during my year, both in Kent and nationally, and I have participated in many. The 80th anniversary of D-Day started for me in Chatham Historic Dockyard at the National Destroyer Memorial where I was honoured to recite the Exhortation. I then moved on to New Romney and joined the mayor for a fish and chip charity lunch for armed forces charities. My day ended at Canterbury Cathedral for Evensong to commemorate D-Day. Chatham Historic Dockyard also celebrates 40 years this year and the RNLI, whose Lifeboat Museum is at Chatham Historic Dockyard, celebrates 200. I have been fortunate to be able to join celebrations for both.

In August I unveiled a plaque commemorating 150 years of HMP Rochester. The plaque had not only been made with the expertise and skills of those

in the prison stonemasons' workshop, but also had my name on it!

Law and order, areas of significant responsibility for High Sheriffs, have been a primary focus. To date I have visited both Crown Courts a number of times, sitting with judges and witnessing the swearing-in of new magistrates. The Witness Service and its remarkable volunteers invited me to a celebratory thank you tea as well as a visit to see their work at Maidstone Crown Court. I have visited two of our prisons more than once with plans in progress to visit the others.

My involvement with Kent Police has been significant and is continuing. I have been honoured to join the Chief Constable or his deputy at a number of award ceremonies and passing out parades. The citations I have heard are simply astonishing and it is truly humbling to participate in these events.

Presenting awards is a joy. Whether this is a High Sheriff's Award, a police award, a reward and recognition certificate in a prison, a volunteer or any other group or individual, it is a very great honour to recognise such richly deserving people.

My best invitation to date was from Kent Search and Rescue to join an exercise. My role – to be a body and be found by dogs!

I have made many visits to charities, organisations and events and have a packed diary in the months ahead. I am delivering many speeches and am particularly enjoying and sharing some fascinating aspects of shrieval history as well as explaining the role of the High Sheriff.

The recognition, acknowledgement and thanks that I can give to the inspiring people of Kent in this role is an honour and a privilege. It is also immensely enjoyable.



On board HMS *Cavalier* at Chatham Historic Dockyard for the 80th anniversary of D-Day with, among others, Dennis Potter (Chairman Royal Naval Association Chatham Branch) and Brigadier Peter Gilbert QVRM TD DL



On the nave steps in Rochester Cathedral for the Justice Service with (centre front) David Hurst (Essex), Mr Justice Murray, Lord Justice Males, Mr Justice Johnson, Catherine Lloyd (Under Sheriff), Lucinda Fraser (East Sussex) and Samantha Price (Deputy Chief Superintendent Kent Police)