

# A compassionate visit to Southport



His Majesty King Charles III signs the book of condolence at Southport Town Hall Photo: Ryan Birchall



Dr Ruth Hussey (Vice Lord-Lieutenant), Cllr June Burns (Mayor of Sefton) and His Majesty The King look at the array of flowers and teddy bears in the centre of Southport Photo: Ryan Birchall

## Professor John Mohin OBE DL

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The tragic events that took place at Southport at the end of July probably require no further explanation. What transpired from the bleak darkness of that moment was a radiant beam of light that effectively helped the healing process of bringing a community back together.

This took the form of a visit by His Majesty King Charles III, taking time out from his holiday in Balmoral to come and express his personal concern – a remarkable gesture that was both welcome and deeply appreciated.

The King met with the bereaved families and took time to extend his deepest sympathy; he later signed the book of condolence at Southport Town Hall.

Outside, he inspected a sea of flowers and messages laid in sympathy by mainly local people but which also included floral tributes in memory of those who had died from Prime Minister Keir Starmer, the Home Secretary and others, together with a wealth of teddy bears.

All the time, His Majesty was greeted by the many smiling faces of children – boys wearing T-shirts depicting favourite logos and girls in pretty summer dresses, some of whom presented The King with gifts of pictures and cufflinks which he graciously accepted.

The King met with members of the emergency services who had attended the incident and spoke with the police officers who had first confronted the scene, including PC Luke Holden and PCSO Tim Parry. He talked with the paramedics who administered emergency medical attention and listened to

some of their own personal stories.

Imam Ibrahim Hussein, who kept vigil inside Southport mosque, was introduced to the King and described his personal experience as the building was attacked and the perimeter walls torn down.

Local builder, Bill Parkinson, ably assisted by Matthew Carroll and Sam Eaton, who repaired the mosque and helped rebuild the walls, were thanked personally by His Majesty. Daniel and Diane Martin who had willingly extended the use of their home for members of the emergency services to use also spoke with The King.

Chanaka and Jhanuja Balasuriya, owners of the mini mart that was damaged, also met with The King, as did Mike and Eva Ainscough, who made sure the floral bouquets were well watered and went to great lengths to look after the teddy bears, taking them in at night and dutifully rearranging them outside again each

morning. The King took special interest in the care and counselling provided by local faith leaders and met with Canon Kevin McLoughlin and Reverend Rachel Bray.

What emerged overall was a visible and sincere demonstration of a local community coming together in harmony to confront adversity, to overcome the pain and to care for each other at a time of unprecedented tragedy. They each showed in their various ways, all very poignant and deeply significant, that we will remember those who suffered and especially those died, but at the same time continue to look to the future with a spirit of confidence and optimism.

We have a great deal to be thankful for in Merseyside, not the least of which is the strength of our wider community as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the County of Merseyside and also the centenary of the consecration of Liverpool Anglican Cathedral in 1924.



His Majesty The King meets with Jhanuja and Chanaka Balasuriya, owners of the mini mart impacted by the riots in Southport