

Declaring your intentions

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High Sheriff of Mid Glamorgan 2024-2025

Preparing for the office of High Sheriff was, for me, a roller coaster of emotions ranging from thrilling, exciting, energising, and anticipatory to scary, daunting and at times simply overwhelming. The feelings varied as the date of the Declaration ceremony – which had once seemed an age away – was suddenly only days away, with still so much to do and think about. I imagine the same emotions prevail for most of us.

Six months into a busy but enjoyable and absorbing shrieval year, the Declaration ceremony with its challenges and importance is easy to forget. In your county it may have a well-established format, but it is a unique event for every High Sheriff and an opportunity to lay the foundations and set the tone for your year in office.

Your Declaration can be conducted around the dinner table in the intimate surroundings of your own home with just the outgoing High Sheriff, a High Court Judge or Justice of the Peace, your Lord-Lieutenant, Under Sheriff and nearest and dearest. Alternatively, it can be as public as you want, thanking those from every aspect of your life whom you appreciate, admire, love and who have helped you along the way, and including those you want to engage with during your shrieval year. I chose the latter.

Regardless, confirming a date, venue, and availability of key players is a prerequisite. My Under Sheriff and shrieval assistant were vital in this. Undertake the groundwork very early.

The number of guests dictates the size of venue and securing your desired venue may mean booking many months ahead. My original choice was unavailable due to



With South Wales Police Halberdiers, His Honour Judge Hopkins KC, Prof Jean White CBE (outgoing High Sheriff), and Prof Peter Vaughan QPM (Lord-Lieutenant)

over-running refurbishment, which required flexibility and a switch from town hall to sports centre, but all's well that ends well as it proved a great success. Trust the experts at your venue to ensure all goes well but have a clear plan, visit in advance and express your expectations clearly and comprehensively.

A guest list is essential, as is a timeline and process for sending out invitations and collating replies whether electronically or by post, as this guides seating plans and catering. Catering is of course a job in itself and I elicited the support of the stewardess from my local rugby club who arranged everything impeccably. Canapes and cava taster sessions were events in themselves!

Directions to the venue, parking, an event programme, business cards, banners, social media accounts all require consideration and advanced planning.

You may wish to appoint a chaplain or faith leader(s) as well as a police cadet.

Traditionally, in Mid Glamorgan, the Declaration is attended by the South Wales Police band fanfare team and

by Halberdiers who provide a unique ceremonial presence, but they do need to be booked early.

Entertainment is optional, but in a Welsh valley town a choir was the clear and obvious choice. Musical collaboration is notoriously difficult, but all allegiances were put aside as the musical talent from seven Maesteg choirs collaborated to form a 100-voice mixed choir and created the hiraeth with three heartfelt, spine-tingling and moving pieces.

A theme or charity for the year is not necessary but can provide a helpful focus. I chose school exclusion and the charity Dallaglio RugbyWorks to partner with me during my year in office. Seven out of ten people jailed were at some point excluded from school, so a charity focusing on prevention through a rugby skills programme seemed appropriate. A representative of the charity, a young person previously excluded from school himself, spoke at my Declaration to powerful effect.

The day will fly by, so make a record to look back on through photographs, video or webcast. Photography students from Bridgend College covered my day and did a fine job.

An unexpected pleasure was the amount of positive feedback I received from a community delighted to have been a part of this centuries-old ceremony.

I hope this brief resume of my own Declaration (planning spreadsheet available, just ask) will be of some assistance in your own preparations, and I hope your day will be as memorable as my own. Most importantly, enjoy every moment as it is the prelude to an extraordinary year.



Members of Mixed Maesteg Choir. All photos: Photography students from Bridgend College