

# Just one High Sheriff's experience

Being both a magistrate and boring, my shrieval focus has been on the justice system, especially seeking out and thanking its lesser known and unthanked contributors. First, though, I had to obtain leave of absence from the Bench, to be granted by its chairman – an easier conversation as it was me! From then on, I have been learning every day:

- **Innovation:** I am a bit of a dinosaur but traditions can often be improved – and failure has little downside as next year's High Sheriff can always revert. So, for example, a dramatic new venue for my Declaration and moving my Law Lecture to attract the universities seemed good to me and might in the future.
- **Connection:** introducing one of Kurshida Mirza's (High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire) charities to Oxfordshire possibilities; our two law faculties to our judiciary; tribunal members to the magistracy... A High Sheriff can make so many useful links with no possible harm, while some might become a powerful legacy.
- **Convening:** never underestimate the shrieval 'convening power'. Inspired by my predecessor Sally Scott's promotion of Family Drug and Alcohol Courts, I have tried to keep her agenda alive; and I may also have scored a hit introducing the youth justice innovations of Amy Crawford, my wonderful Northamptonshire contemporary, to my Police and Crime Commissioner and my Youth Panel Chairman.



**Introducing Simon Chesterman, Chief Constable of the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, to Lord-Lieutenant Marjorie Glasgow BEM Photo: Dr Nicholas Posner**

- **Recognition:** our national honours are so few and far between they barely skim the surface of all the unsung good going on in the county. A fellow in weird clothing turning up and saying 'thank you' can make a huge difference – and I try to leave behind a certificate as a lasting reminder for organisations and – when I can persuade them to nominate some – for individuals. IKEA is no doubt pondering the sudden spike in sales of their cheapest frames!
- **Discovery:** having thought I knew something about the legal system, I am constantly finding new organisations to recognise. A mayor-making brought me to a domestic violence charity; our VAWG (violence against women and girls) conference took me to, of all things, a people's theatre collective doing amazing work with teenagers around sexual violence and bullying; and sitting in the Coroner's Court introduced me to eight unsung volunteers supporting bereaved families in devastating circumstances – I won't stop looking!



**The sword was welcome... even in HMP Huntercombe**

- **Welcome:** the goodwill embodied in this arcane office is unbelievable. I have never been anything other than heartily welcomed wherever I have gone, presumably because our message is always supportive and positive. This naturally encourages further exploration – there seems to be no limits.
- **Administration:** don't underestimate the time needed to arrange engagements and, of course, to thank them afterwards. I am lucky enough to have the support of an event organiser (as I'd be hopeless at this) but it is vital to set aside enough time for logistics to avoid becoming overwhelmed. It's all in support of the good cause but, being invisible, can be overlooked.
- **Bling:** nobody's ever been disappointed when I've arrived in court dress, only when (because they've asked me not to) I haven't. The badge stands out quite well in photos but nothing beats the full rig. In the same vein, printing off smart certificates and a grandiose letterhead means I've been getting thank you letters for my thank you letters!
- **Publicity:** as a social media dinosaur, I've had to engage help with this but getting word out about both the shrievalty and the good people I visit is always welcomed. It takes very little effort and, I hope, builds a body of followers for my successors to do even more with.



**My Declaration took place in the Convocation House in the Old Bodleian Library, followed by a reception in the Divinity School Photo: Dr Nicholas Posner**

Of course, this is just one High Sheriff's experience and, as I'm only halfway through, I am sure I have much more to learn in the months to come. All the same, I hope my flight experience to date – scattering so much goodwill must be the most rewarding thing I ever done – is some help to those revving up on the runway.