

The new Mary Poppins?



With the Rt Revd Jonathan Gibbs (Bishop of Rochester) and the Lady Colgrain (Lord-Lieutenant of Kent) at the service of thanks and celebration for the volunteers of Kent at Rochester Cathedral
Photo: Russell Harper Photography

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High Sheriff of Kent 2024-25

The second half of my shrieval year started with my Justice Service for the County of Kent in the magnificent surroundings of Rochester Cathedral, on 4 October. I was honoured to welcome Lord Justice Males from the Court of Appeal as well as Mr Justice Murray, Mr Justice Johnson, David Hurst DL, Lucinda Fraser DL (High Sheriffs of Essex and East Sussex respectively) and members of the judiciary of Kent. The service reflected justice in different faiths. Baritone Patrick Keefe delivered 'Go Down, Moses' from Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* with the choir. Textus Roffensis ('the Rochester book'), which predates Magna Carta by almost a century and contains the laws of the time, was carried to the altar by Lord Justice Males.

At the end of October I was privileged to be invited to the installation of the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports. Admiral Sir George Zambellas was duly installed following on from predecessors Lord Boyce, Her Majesty The Queen Mother and Sir Winston Churchill – a historic and special day.

November brought the 40th anniversary of Maidstone Crown Court. The court building was opened by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The celebration was attended

by the Lady Chief Justice in addition to other senior members of the judiciary and was celebrated with a service at All Saints, Maidstone and a reception at the Crown Court.

My diary was very full with a variety of events as Christmas approached. The 80th anniversary of HMS *Cavalier's* launch and first commission in Chatham Historic Dockyard, University of Kent graduations, visits to charities, Kent Bar Mess dinner, citizenship ceremonies and visits to Crown Court ensured I was fully occupied.

I attended 12 carol concerts across Kent. Several were in Rochester and Canterbury cathedrals, three were in prisons and the remainder were in other Kent churches. They were all very different and equally moving and beautiful.

My first engagement of the new year



Commemorative plaque at HMP Rochester

was in Margate at the 60th anniversary of the Greek Orthodox Blessing of the Seas ceremony.

I have had the privilege of seeing many different aspects of the work of Kent Police. These have included walking the beat, meeting senior officers, serving a warrant with CID, visiting the police at the Channel Tunnel, joining a shift with the armed response officers and the joint police paramedic vehicle, observing the Kent Police National Negotiator Course, the Kent Network of Women conference and police recruits' training on gangs, to name a large variety of work. There is much more besides.

Charity visits included those working in domestic abuse, dementia, therapy for abused children, stalking and those impacted by gangs. The work is extraordinarily challenging but vitally important. It is truly humbling to hear about this work at first hand.

I joined Mr Justice Kerr in Canterbury Crown Court on the bench for part of a trial in February and was also able to offer him hospitality in the form of dinner with his clerk. Kent no longer has judges' lodgings.

I was honoured to be present at the visit of Her Majesty Queen Camilla to Canterbury to unveil the Aphra Behn statue.

The Lord-Lieutenant and I jointly hosted a service to celebrate and thank the volunteers of Kent in late March in Rochester Cathedral. We welcomed almost 700 volunteers from 180 organisations to what was a joyous and uplifting service.

There is much joy and humour in this role. I visited a primary school in March and asked the children who they thought I was. 'The Queen' was the first reply; 'a town crier' the second. I wasn't prepared for the next one: 'You're Mary Poppins!' I wish!



On a visit to Kent Surrey Sussex Air Ambulance