

The Sheriff's Shindig and the Melton Proms

John Chatfeild-Roberts

High Sheriff of Leicestershire 2024-25

As for others, the last year has been an honour; fascinating, extraordinary, rewarding, joyous and humbling are words that spring to mind. What a privilege. At my Declaration, I promised to create a two-day music event centred on children – a tall order since it was only the germ of idea. Nothing like a public promise to concentrate the mind! STEM subjects are obviously very important, but for healthy minds – directly related to behaviour in society and High Sheriff territory – finding joy in performing and listening to music takes a lot of beating.

I put it on in the market town of Melton Mowbray – known for Stilton, pork pies and hunting – in collaboration with Water City Music and the Melton Mowbray Town Estate. It was an incredible two days! For advance publicity, *Melton Times* covered it, we leafleted the locality, social media was on song, Petroc Trelawny mentioned it on Radio 3 Breakfast and I was interviewed on both BBC Radio Leicester and local station 103 The Eye. On the second Sunday in March the sun shone down from clear blue skies on the covered stage in Melton Market Place in a balmy 17 degrees (Napoleon said, 'Give me lucky generals') for the 'Sheriff's Shindig' as the teenage Leicester based Cosmopolitan Arts led off a troupe of performers with a brilliant rendition of 'I Shot the Sheriff'! A wicked sense of humour and great performances of well-known songs. Other acts included fabulous local 'Vintage singer of vintage songs' from the 1940s, Lili Redman, the 24-piece Belvoir Big Band (which practises in the village hall of Harby, where I live), the vibrant Leicester based Sambando, a Samba band who certainly let the audience know they were in town, and the excellent Musical Village Community Choir (Leicester Forest East), who included several singalong numbers. The shindig ran from 11 am to 4 pm with a regularly changing audience of never less than 100 folk in the Market Place watching and listening all day – a vibrant and successful prelude to the main event.

This was an evening concert, the 'Melton Proms' in St Mary's Church, involving over 120 nine- and ten-year-old children from ten different primary schools in the Melton and Vale of Belvoir area, with a sell-out audience of 500. The children, who had been rehearsing all term in their individual



Cosmopolitan Arts (top), Lili Redman (bottom) and Sambando performing at the Sheriff's Shindig with 'guest appearance' by High Sheriff John Chatfeild-Roberts (centre left)

schools instructed by Pete Leonard (teacher, musician and polymath, who visited every school on multiple occasions), sang in a massed choir. They had their first and final combined rehearsal with the professional chamber orchestra, Orchestra Pro Anima, that afternoon. Directed by Michael Bochmann MBE from the violin, the first 40 minutes comprised three orchestral pieces by Vivaldi, Bach and Bartok. The rapt attention on those children's faces was a joy to behold as they absorbed Bach's Double Violin Concerto being performed live, literally right in front of their noses. I'm sure few

would have been to a classical concert and it was surely a lightbulb moment for many – the excitement was palpable. Following a short interval for the children to form up on stage, there was then the delight on their and the audience's faces as they performed Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy', 'Shenandoah', 'Fire' by Jonathan Dove and 'Jerusalem'. We ended with the national anthem. My hope is that this formative experience will stay with the children for the rest of their lives and that some will have caught the music bug. My intention is that this will, with outside sponsorship, become an annual event.



The massed choirs with Orchestra Pro Anima at the first Melton Proms with Michael Bochmann MBE (front second from left) and Pete Leonard (standing far right)

Uplifting, inspiring and very worthwhile

Professor John Mohin OBE DL

High Sheriff of Merseyside 2024-25

I was extremely fortunate to be installed as High Sheriff in the year in which the County of Merseyside celebrated its 50th anniversary. The county embraces the Liverpool City Region and the City of Liverpool, where I was born and brought up.

Of perhaps greatest significance to me as High Sheriff, Merseyside Police also celebrated its 50th anniversary and this provided a platform upon which to celebrate the contribution they have made in 'Putting our Community First' as they have proved so often.

The tragic events that took place in Southport last year were horrific; what was a major tragedy for everyone ultimately served to exemplify the role of Merseyside Police working closely with all of the emergency services, the judiciary, solicitors, barristers, magistrates and the prison service – all coming together to administer justice with exemplary skill and professional discipline.

As a corollary to all this, I have presided at police commendation ceremonies to recognise the outstanding work of detectives, the courage of police officers and the achievements of police colleagues. Bringing all these strands together, I work alongside Merseyside Police Heritage and Archives Board and we have ambitious plans to create two new museum initiatives which capture the history of policing and celebrate all of our blue light services. This is work in progress.

A key mission for my year was to stimulate and encourage enterprise. As a direct result, the Centre for Enterprise was established under the auspices of the University of Liverpool to incubate business ideas, inventions, designs, pharmaceutical innovation and, at the same time, accommodate local entrepreneurs.

During my shrieval year, we welcomed HMS *Prince of Wales*, the aircraft carrier and flagship of the Royal Navy which was granted the Freedom of Liverpool by the Lord Mayor and invited to stage a march past in front of Liverpool Town Hall. On board ship, certain thoroughfares and gangways now carry Liverpool street names, including 'Penny Lane'.

It's so incredibly gratifying that the region has proved such an exciting place



With George Tickle and Alicia Ludgate, Merseyside Police Cadets, Crispin Pailing DL and Garth Dallas (Chair of Liverpool Commonwealth Association) on Remembrance Sunday at St George's Hall Cenotaph, Liverpool

to serve as His Majesty's High Sheriff. Addressing schools and, in particular, sixth-form students on the issue of substance abuse and the misuse of drugs has been enlightening.

The High Sheriff's Fund and Merseyside Police Charitable Fund have long worked closely with the Community Foundation for Merseyside, ensuring that valuable financial assistance is directed toward projects that prevent crime, improve community safety and create diversionary activities for young people. On behalf of the fund, we have made site visits, met with social groups and families and found a means to contribute sensitively.

In attending the passing out ceremonies of Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service, I have been continually impressed by the professionalism of the Training and Development Academy which helps shape first-class operational firefighters. The firefighter recruit course is demanding in that it prepares the new recruits for the varied and challenging role of a firefighter – a set of skills that far and away exceed the task of putting out fires.

Visiting the Liverpool Heart and Chest Hospital proved inspirational and I was pleased to lend my support for their fundraising campaign. LHCH has developed the only purpose-built medical simulation centre in the United Kingdom dedicated to the training of medical staff and students;

their aim is nothing less than treating and caring for people living with complex heart and lung conditions, a very worthy cause.

When the 80th anniversary of D-Day took place in June 2024, I was honoured and delighted to meet D-Day veterans and their families; this was a poignant occasion and one that gave me the chance as High Sheriff to express my thanks for their service to our country.

Liverpool is considered the spiritual home of Cunard, founded in 1859, and so it was with some historical significance that the naming ceremony of their latest ship, *Queen Anne*, took place on our world-famous waterfront.

During the course of the past year, we have been pleased to welcome His Majesty The King, Their Royal Highnesses The Prince and Princess of Wales, and Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal, a regular and most welcome visitor to Merseyside. Her Royal Highness spoke at the Racing Welfare charity lunch held at Aintree at the beginning of the Grand National Festival to address her concern about mental health within the racing fraternity.

I have touched upon only a fraction of the many events that I have attended during what has proved a year of such edifying significance – uplifting, inspiring and very worthwhile.

First and second things



Amy Crawford JP

High Sheriff of Northamptonshire 2024-25

How can we, as a community, stop the cycle of violence and better support young people? This was the theme for my year. As a magistrate I knew it was going to be focused on the criminal justice system, particularly youth justice, having sat in youth courts for fifteen years or so. This was the thoughtful debate at my shrieval lecture at the University of Northampton, delivered by John Sutherland, a retired senior police officer in the Met. He focused on knife crime and the importance of prioritising fundamental social values over reactive measures such as harsher punishments and building more prisons. We simply cannot sentence our way out of the problems facing us as a society, so we need to go back upstream and peel away the layers of 'why?' What comes first and what comes second?

Early in my tenure, I worked with Jane Deamer from the Crysalys Foundation, which has pioneered a youth court initiative in Northamptonshire for around the last three years. The Youth Court Solutions project provides immediate 'trauma-informed' support to young offenders, their families and victims

At the Northamptonshire Courts Service with (back row) Nick Rubins (Notts), Richard Coles (Rutland), Ian Morgan (Derbyshire), Alex Barfield (Berks), Kurshida Mirza (Bucks), and (front row) James Macnamara (Oxon), John Chatfeild-Roberts (Leics), James Saunders Watson (Lord-Lieutenant of Northamptonshire; High Sheriff 2018), Raji Gill (Warks) and Bav Shah (Beds) Photo: Ketan Photography



At the launch of the Belonging Charter and Protocol for Decriminalisation of Children in Care with Dominic Goble JP DL, Danielle Stone (Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner), Charlotte Franks (head teacher of the virtual school supporting children in care in North Northamptonshire), Colin Foster (Chief Executive Northamptonshire Children's Trust), Cllr Fiona Baker (Children's Services portfolio holder for West Northamptonshire Council) and Emma James (Assistant Chief Constable)

upon arrival at the courthouse. The results have been significant in driving down re-offending alongside two other problem-solving initiatives that involve

youth magistrates. To expand this approach, I invited my fellow High Sheriffs to a symposium to explore implementing it in their counties. Jane has also



In Towcester for a trek around the county – a High Sheriff and Northamptonshire Community Foundation joint initiative raising awareness of local youth charities and organised by Northamptonshire Walks

presented at the Midlands region High Sheriffs' Association conference and will speak at the seminar for High Sheriffs in nomination later this year to spread the word and upscale this successful model.

Why do a disproportionate number of children in care end up in youth courts? To address this question, I convened the Northamptonshire Children's Trust, our two unitary councils, the police and two outstanding care home providers. Together they have developed a children's Belonging Charter setting minimum standards for care homes and improving support for staff and, most importantly, vulnerable children.

Alongside this, the police have drawn up a new code of practice to help prevent children in care from being unnecessarily criminalised and have given guidance for providers regarding callouts. My visits to care homes and the police child exploitation hub reinforced how our children in care should be treated as well as the need for collaboration to raise

standards and protect at-risk youth. All agencies have worked incredibly hard and I hope this piece of work will have a lasting impact on what should be a given for all children in care.

Otherwise, it has been a busy year where I have been allowed to be 'politely curious'. There are so many occasions and events I savoured, but here are a few:

- Hosting ten High Sheriffs to support the Courts Service
- Sitting with Crown Court and High Court judges on their trials
- Visiting prisons and probation services
- Walking across the county on my High Sheriff's treks with the Northamptonshire Community Foundation and Northamptonshire Walks, meeting many charities with young people at the core of their activities
- Rough sleeping under tarpaulin to raise

awareness for homelessness on the coldest and wettest night imaginable

- Presenting three High Sheriff's Awards to individuals for their outstanding contributions to the Independent Monitoring Board at our local prison, a Referral Order panellist at the Youth Justice Service and a lady running two outstanding children's care homes while providing voluntary advice to the police around trauma-informed practice
- Providing a broadcast on the role of High Sheriff on a local radio station at Christmas

As I return to the Bench, I do so with a deeper understanding of the justice system and with immense respect for those dedicated to maintaining law and order. This year has been an extraordinary privilege, and I will always be grateful for the inspiring people I have met throughout my year.

The Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal

High Sheriffs intending to lay wreaths during the Armistice period can order these with the High Sheriffs' badge in the centre from The Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal.



Orders should be placed (quoting stock code H0018) by calling the Poppy Appeal on **01622 717172** and speaking to a Regional Organiser.

Please order in good time.



What a High Sheriff does

Lucia Bridgeman

High Sheriff of Northumberland 2024-25

The inevitable question 'What does a High Sheriff do?' still remains a difficult one to answer. At the beginning of the year it was difficult because I really wasn't quite sure; and now at the end of the year it's because I have too much to say about it. I try to explain how the connections have built up over the year to draw the whole county together. The vast collection of organisations and places, activities and initiatives, volunteers and long-term workers I have encountered has been breath-taking. The interrelations spring up all the time – the Scout leader also volunteers with the Mountain Rescue team; the lead gardener of a charity green space also sings in the inclusive folk group; the volunteer chef at Escape, the drug and alcohol abuse support network, trains at the award-winning boxing club; and the magistrate is a trustee of the charity which provides day-care services for people with complex mental health needs and learning difficulties.

Meeting our Police and Crime Commissioner at theatre groups, knife crime meetings, the domestic abuse services charity and at various other moments has built a relationship where the High Sheriff's knowledge has proved useful. I have had time to head to the more remote areas across Northumberland and visit the smaller groups. I have also had the 'grass roots experience' of going out, for example, on exercise with the search and rescue team, hearing how they are so often called upon to look for vulnerable people under extreme stress. And I have spent time with prison charities supporting ex-offenders and also prisoners out on ROTL at the bike repair shop or Newcastle Cathedral café. 'I like you for your contacts' was my last interaction with the Police and Crime



Youth club 'Hexham Youth Initiative' at the High Sheriff's Awards evening, with Northumbrian born Alexander Armstrong



Awarding certificates at the Kokoro Karate competition

Commissioner and that was when I knew that High Sheriffs do play a valuable role.

The contacts within one particular category, youth groups, have led to one of the most exciting proposals to emerge from this year. The Northumberland Challenge, an initiative organised through a network of youth clubs, is a simple, affordable, achievable version of the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, which may encourage children to take up the DofE or other activities in the future. I have met over 10 youth groups throughout Northumberland and in learning about their interconnected aims it has been a logical step to combine the 'authority' of the High Sheriff with this project – to engage young people in volunteering, getting out in their county, experiencing new things and challenging themselves. The Challenge booklet, with its six missions, will also contain a short history of High Sheriffs, showing young people that their efforts are valued and will be supported. The four future High Sheriffs in nomination and our Under Sheriff, plus the Community Foundation, all collaborated on this scheme with the youth clubs, and the very satisfying conclusion is that the successful completion of the Northumberland Challenge will be acknowledged with a special High Sheriff's certificate.

On the legal side of the High Sheriff coin I sat with High Court judges four times in the Crown Court in Newcastle, had three dinners at home with four judges and was invited three times to their lodgings, witnessed the swearing-in ceremony of

new magistrates and visited both the Magistrates' and Business and Property Courts.

Every week in my diary has been different, with a mix of formal events and then those requiring waterproofs and walking boots, or just jeans. Changing on the side of the road into the coat, lace and hat has become standard practice and made me appreciate all those whose position requires them to wear some form of uniform. Ironically, these accoutrements bring an anonymity to the role, which allows us each year to meld into the role of High Sheriff.

I recently received an email from a Turkish refugee I have got to know very well, who works in Northumberland for the national Dialogue Society. He explained that it is important for him to work with the High Sheriff because 'you are covering everyone in our county, representing everyone and working for everyone'. His sentiment might answer some questions about what a High Sheriff does.



Visiting the Woodfuel Centre near Blyth, a social day-care centre, supporting people living with complex mental health needs and learning disabilities

Doing it differently (again)

Richard Cole TD

High Sheriff of Rutland 2024-25

I am in a 'fairly' unique position having served as High Sheriff during the Covid pandemic and back then titled my magazine article 'Doing it differently' as circumstances forced us to engage via Zoom, letter-writing and occasional socially-distanced meetings in car parks when conditions allowed.

I was honoured to be nominated to serve again but would my previous experience make me better prepared second time around? In terms of how I planned and prepared, I do not think so, but regarding how I communicated, I knew that social media would be key to extending my reach across the county.

Many of my fellow High Sheriffs choose a theme or focus for their year but I decided not to. I wanted to be open to everyone in Rutland as these remain tough times for many in our community and the traditions of our role can offer reassurance.

A key aim for me was to engage, listen to people's stories and thank them for what they contribute to make the lives of those around them better, to know that their acts of kindness are recognised and valued.

Wherever I went, I used social media to cast a light on the good things that the people I met are doing. I also used it and the volunteer network of Citizens Advice Rutland to invite people to identify their own local heroes; this enabled me to recognise more people than I would otherwise have been able to do. I was



Walking the beat with officers from the Rutland beat team

delighted to present several High Sheriff's Awards on their behalf.

I was fortunate to visit our local police force on many occasions and was always in awe of their commitment to serving our communities. A personal highlight was walking the beat with a number of local officers which gave me a real insight into the challenges that they face daily but, equally, the huge rewards they get from what they do and the impact that they have. An extra special bonus is to have the support of a police cadet; my cadet has been a fantastic ambassador for young people throughout.

In fulfilling our traditional role of supporting the maintenance of law and order, encouraging public sector agencies and voluntary sector organisations – especially those involved in crime reduction and social cohesion – I am hugely grateful

for the time they so generously gave me to get a real understanding of their work.

It has been great fun to celebrate the success some of our brilliant young people whether on school visits, presentation evenings, art, drama or sports events. I joined all our local primary schools when they went to Warning Zone in Leicester where they experienced the learning zones that teach key life skills and safeguarding messages to 10- to 11-year-olds. The zones help them make safe decisions and choices in their everyday lives and online.

I have been humbled by the generosity of so many selfless, good and caring people. I hope I have listened well to their stories and positively encouraged them; I hope they feel that I have taken the time to show interest, recognise, empower and thank them for whatever they do.

I would offer the following advice to future High Sheriffs: be careful in the selection of your theme to be sure that it will resonate with the most people possible in your county rather than a niche personal interest; be open to everything that comes your way; take what you do seriously but never yourself and always do it with a smile.



Joining the Honda Goldwing Owners Club at their national gathering in Oakham



With members of the school council at Catmose College, Oakham



Presenting a High Sheriff's Award to Matt Basey of Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service

Daunting, fascinating, rewarding



At Midlands Air Ambulance headquarters on the occasion of their volunteers' party with Charles Moyle (Worcs), Julia Mitchell (Staffs) and Patricia Churchward (Herefordshire)

Brian Welti JP

High Sheriff of Shropshire

Serving as the custodian of this historic role in a modern world has been daunting, fascinating, rewarding and, of course, an absolute privilege and honour.

I look back with great pleasure on the many engagements that I have made throughout the ceremonial County of Shropshire, getting to thank the representatives of our legal system, where I have observed the Crown, Family, Coroners' and Magistrates' Courts, as well as the probation and prison services. I have patrolled with the police, attended the attestation of our new Chief Constable and 20 new recruits, and witnessed the swearing in of the PCC.

I was able to fulfil the High Sheriff's role as returning officer for the county, resulting in a 38-hour shift without sleep due to pre-booked engagements on the Friday after. Nevertheless, an unforgettable experience.

A busy military year with the 80th

D-Day celebrations and my visit to RAF Shawbury to fly in the helicopter simulator, experience the air traffic and tactical weapons training simulators as well taking the salute at local town march pasts.

I have been humbled by the kindness and generosity of my many hosts and when meeting some of the 74,000 volunteers we know about in the county, who are involved in such an incredible variety of organisations, celebrations, anniversaries and groups all generously sparing the time to share with me what they do. I had the opportunity to thank many of them by staging a high tea event at Telford Fire Station hosting 300 guests representing many of the charities I visited.

Of particular note was the 2025 High Sheriff of Shropshire's Young Citizen Awards at Telford College where I presented special awards to 64 inspiring young people who had achieved amazing things in their young lives – that was in addition to the 70 or so High Sheriff's Recognition Awards made throughout the year.

I have recently launched the High Sheriff's Fund for 2024-25, inviting applications from charities and organisations to help young people improve their lives and help to give them clear direction.

A visit to the new headquarters of the Midlands Air Ambulance in Shropshire, saw the High Sheriffs of Shropshire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire all presenting awards at the same event to recipients from our respective counties – a wonderful day all working together.

It has been a joy to visit many more such organisations and groups, and I hope I have been able to impart a wider understanding of the Shrievalty. I have thanked a great many people for the incredible work and service they give as volunteers both individually and within charitable organisations; our county and society would not survive without them.

I have been humbled by the efforts that have gone into making my visits memorable.

I have supported our Lord-Lieutenant at three royal visits and presented certificates at the citizenship ceremony.

I have been privileged to be a part of the West Midlands region or posse (as we called it) of High Sheriffs. Posse did seem to be the appropriate collective noun. We gelled very early on in our journey through nomination, regularly chatting, meeting up and exchanging ideas.

My chosen theme for the year was to raise the profile of all the issues affecting farming and rural communities – which has taken on even more meaning during my year of office – supporting the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution and Shropshire Rural Support which are both busier than ever.



In the company of mayors, magistrates, visiting High Sheriffs, High Court judges and members of the police leaving from Oswestry School to process to the legal service Photo: Russell Davies Photography



Presenting a High Sheriff's Award to Martin Wood, Town Crier of Shrewsbury, marking his 40 years of service

On a mission for volunteering

Rob Beckley QPM

High Sheriff of Somerset 2024-25

Somerset has had a long tradition of combining the annual Legal Service with the Declaration of the new High Sheriff, held in the majestic Wells Cathedral. This took place in late March and, with the talented Wells Cathedral School choristers and the spine-tingling fanfares of their brass ensemble, the service was spectacular and atmospheric. Of course, it isn't a competition but there can be few such magnificent shrieval events in the country.

During the Legal Service, I chose to read an extract from a speech by Archbishop Tutu. The great man's words are so relevant in such unsettled and binary times. It is important to reflect on the importance of restorative justice and our interdependencies as human beings. As High Sheriffs we will have all seen the challenges faced by people in the justice and prison systems and I recommend Archbishop Tutu's philosophy of Ubuntu and thoughtful forgiveness.

We, as High Sheriffs, will also have witnessed at first hand the remarkable impact and extent of volunteering in our communities. In my shrieval year, I have organised discussions and initiatives to promote and encourage greater voluntary participation in Somerset, especially by



Collage of photos, including Deborah Meaden top right, taken by Dom Chambers at the High Sheriff's Charitable Trust Volunteering Conference on 7 February in North Cadbury Court



Avon and Somerset Police chaplains, along with Deputy Chief Constable Jon Reilly, the force volunteer coordinator, Kate Masters, and the Bishop of Bath and Wells, the Rt Revd Michael Beasley, at the Wells Legal Service Photo Mark Pickthall

younger people. I ran a busy and well-received volunteering fair in our county town Taunton and, as the year concluded, I organised, with the active support of the High Sheriff of Somerset Charitable Trust, a Somerset-wide conference to explore ways to encourage more sustained voluntary engagement.

The conference was informative and inspiring. There was an introduction by Deborah Meaden (Somerset entrepreneur and BBC *Dragons' Den* star), presentations from a number of participants and lively table discussions. Deborah described how volunteering is a life-affirming and healthy tonic for you and your community, and how small practical steps and incentives can make a big difference.

The discussions were engaging and challenging. Some local FE college representatives made an impassioned plea for greater engagement with their students and we heard from young people who have found it really difficult finding volunteer groups which can include them.

Solutions and novel ideas were generated and discussed by the delegates.



With Detective Constable Karla Miranda, winner of an Avon and Somerset Outstanding Policing Award, accompanied by her supervisor and Chief Constable Sarah Crew Photo: Sue Beckley

These included better engagement with businesses and colleges; a toolkit for towns and parish councils to support volunteering at a local level; reward and support for young people including accreditation of skills; better evidence-based practice in vetting and safe-guarding processes; and many more practical and innovative proposals. The local volunteer support groups (there are three in Somerset as they cover different unitary authorities) have all picked up this agenda for action.

My year was bookended by policing. I started the year as a police officer, the only known High Sheriff to be both a serving police officer and a High Sheriff simultaneously, albeit only for two weeks. Given my policing pedigree, I made sure that during the year I paid attention to the less visible and less visited parts of policing and the criminal justice system. In my final week as High Sheriff, I went out with the Yeovil Crime Reduction team and ended up chasing and detaining a shoplifter who was running away from a store detective across the town. The shrieval powers of 'hue and cry' might have been abolished in 1827 but they weren't anticipating an ex-police officer becoming High Sheriff in Somerset.



With the young members and volunteer coaches of Crewkerne Boxing Club

Support for our care leavers



Yvonne Gilchrist-Mason OBE DL

High Sheriff of Suffolk 2024-25

The role of High Sheriff is a great honour and, importantly, an opportunity to help others. I underestimated the full implications of carrying out the role and its duties, particularly when doing so alongside a full-time role in our business, running The Mason Trust and chairing the industry partner group at University Technical College Norfolk. Four am starts and very late finishes were not unusual and I relied heavily on family and colleagues to provide the extra support needed to make it all work.

In 18 years of running a charitable trust we had supported and helped many thousands of young people, principally in helping them achieve their ambitions. In all those years we had never knowingly worked with young people in the care system and quite simply had not had visibility of and did not understand their plight or needs. The then High Sheriff of Norfolk brought this to my attention as I

At the groundbreaking ceremony of the expansion of HMP Highpoint – set to become the UK's largest prison – with Sachia Thompson (Deputy Director, Prison Supply), Cllr Liz Harsant (Chair of Suffolk County Council), Tony Hampson (Head of Projects, HMP Highpoint), Cllr Donna Higgins (Families & Communities Portfolio, West Suffolk Council), Linda Kennedy (Executive Director, Prison Supply) and Cllr Nick Clarke (West Suffolk Council)

prepared for the role and I felt compelled to try and help our Suffolk young people who found themselves, through no fault of their own, in that situation. Recognising that the problems came when the young people were in the 'care leaver' category, this became my focus and the research and 'nemawashi' began!

In talking with our Chief Constable, Rachel Kearton, and trying to understand the current issues within the county it was shocking to hear of the prevalence of domestic abuse, which in turn very often propelled children into the care system for their own safety. Conversations with our police colleagues 'on the beat' and in their operational briefings showed that young people from the care system featured high on their daily activities and gave continual cause for concern. Visits to the prisons soon found many care leavers.

With the permission and support of

'the corporate parent' I began the quest to help and along the way have found and worked with many wonderful people, working hard and doing their very best for the care leavers. However, with heads down and their own key focus and



With members of the National Coastwatch Institution at Woodbridge (National Coastwatch is a charity staffed and managed by volunteers whose mission is to help save lives at sea and around the UK coastline)



With Cllr David Smith (Town Mayor) and High Sheriff's cadet Lewis Fox at *The Knife Angel* in Haverhill

targets, broader conversations with other colleagues and agencies were not being had and there seemed to be a particular 'gap' when it came to supporting young care leavers in their career choices, training needs and work opportunities. While the process to meet the need existed, the wider knowledge of opportunity created by economic development, our extensive infrastructure projects and the tiered supply chains that they naturally created was a whole new language to most that I met. Finding contacts in these companies was also a challenge, particularly in our current world of online communication. This is where my background in industry

and previous work on the Local Enterprise Partnership came into its own and many a phone call was made to old friends.

'How can I help?' is a daily mantra and has been for many of my 65 years. I hope to have brought a global outlook and positive energy to every meeting held and given others the confidence to ask more questions, break down barriers, work together and see what is possible and achievable. Knowing what is possible and seeing the need for vision, open and frank conversations, collaboration and cooperation has driven me throughout the year.

Our care leavers group was born and

over the months expanded to encompass all the organisations and agencies which touch their lives. As High Sheriff we have a very privileged 'helicopter view' born of the many visits and meetings from education to public sector to all elements of the criminal justice system. It became clear where the issues and blockers were and by simply introducing people and supporting conversations we have broken down many barriers and opened up opportunities which will benefit our care leavers.

Working alongside The Family Business, Suffolk County Council's wonderful initiative – hugely supported by Julia Nix, our regional DWP manager – and using our own ICANBEA system, we are finding futures and generating significant goodwill and support for our care leavers. From infrastructure projects to local plumbers, doors are being opened.

Accommodation is a fundamental issue; quite simply there is not enough and affordability of what is available when the care leavers are on entry-level packages makes the journey into the workplace particularly difficult. We are working to bring accommodation combined with training into the county, effectively removing barriers and providing a skills pipeline of untapped talent into the workplace all while providing a supported environment to live, learn and be guided into work.

We have many success stories and buoyed by this – and with support from our wonderful Lord-Lieutenant, Clare, Countess of Euston, to continue this work as DL post my year in office – we are setting up The Suffolk Care Leavers Alliance. As our county councils approach devolution we are already in open communication with our friends in Norfolk and what is piloted and learned in Suffolk will be shared.



Celebrating Suffolk Day in Haverhill

The importance of coming together as one community

Rajvinder Kaur Gill JP

High Sheriff of Warwickshire 2024-25

As my year as High Sheriff comes to a close, I find myself reflecting on the incredible experiences, the people I've met and the causes that have left a lasting impact. It has been a year of service, of learning and, above all, of listening – to communities, to those who work tirelessly to make a difference and, most importantly, to our youth.

One of the most humbling experiences was supporting the OurJay Foundation. Born out of tragedy, this foundation has turned grief into a powerful force for change. After Jamie Rees's passing in 2022, his family set out to raise £1,500 for a defibrillator accessible 24/7 at his school. The response was overwhelming and that single goal quickly became a countywide mission. To date, the foundation has raised over £250,000, installed over 215 publicly accessible defibrillators and has more ready to be placed across Warwickshire. These lifesaving devices serve as a lasting tribute to Jamie, ensuring his name continues to make a difference.



With this year's winner of the Young High Sheriff competition, Sophia Wilk from Rugby High School, together with Simon Miesegaes DL (Council, 2019-20) David Kelham DL (2022-23), Clare Sawdon JP DL and Eric Wood OBE

Another proud moment was the success of the Young High Sheriff competition, which gave young people a voice on the issues that matter to them. After

announcing the winner, we went further, delivering workshops where young people shared their concerns about crime and safety. Their message was clear: they want safer streets, better education on crime prevention and real conversations about the challenges they face. It reinforced my passion for educating young people about crime and personal safety – empowering them with knowledge to protect themselves.

A personal highlight was celebrating International Women's Week. I was honoured to be invited to deliver speeches aimed at empowering and supporting women today. Each event reminded me of the importance of lifting one another up, whether in leadership, community work or personal growth. There is so much strength in unity and I hope my words encouraged others to push forward, support one another and continue breaking down barriers.

As High Sheriff one of my most significant responsibilities was to mark the start of the legal year. This year, I had the honour of hosting two very special legal services, each reflective of our shared values of inclusivity, justice and community.

The first service was held at St Mary's Church in Warwick, a tradition that has



With diplomats from China, Penny and Tim Cox (Lord-Lieutenant) and Lord-Lieutenant's cadets for the 460th anniversary celebrations of William Shakespeare's birthday in 2024



At the Old Shire Hall in Warwick for my Declaration with, among others, Sophie Hilleary (2023-24), Giani Surjit Singh (High Sheriff's chaplain), the Honourable Mr Justice Saini (in red), Jagtar Singh Gill OBE (husband), Tim Cox (Lord-Lieutenant), John Rouse (Under Sheriff) and His Honour Judge Lockhart

continued for the past 20 years. It was a truly special occasion with speakers and readings from multiple faiths, as well as music that echoed the diverse cultures within our county. What made this service particularly meaningful was the inclusion of 'Langar', a Sikh tradition of serving free food to all, which was offered to everyone in attendance. This act of hospitality and unity was a reminder of the importance of coming together as one community, regardless of our differences.

The second service was held at the Sikh Gurdwara of Leamington Spa & Warwick, marking a historic moment as it was the first legal service to be held within the Gurdwara. This service was attended by judges, civic leaders, magistrates and members of the wider community, symbolising the unity and respect we have for all members of society. It was an incredibly moving event, reinforcing the

vital role of our diverse communities in shaping the legal landscape and promoting justice for all.

This year has been a privilege, but my journey doesn't end here. Crime prevention and awareness remain my passion and with the connections I have built, I will continue working to educate, engage and drive action. There is still so much work to be done and I remain committed to making a difference – ensuring young people feel safe, that communities are supported and that those in need know they are not alone.

One of the most rewarding aspects of this role has been meeting so many incredible people: from those working behind the scenes in our justice system to community leaders and volunteers who give so much of their time and energy. We are truly fortunate to have such dedicated volunteers who carry out vital work to support and uplift our communities. Their selflessness and commitment remind me that change happens when people come together with a shared purpose.

To everyone who has supported me on this journey – thank you. It has been an honour to serve Warwickshire in this historical role. I have witnessed first-hand the dedication and the strength of community spirit. Your encouragement, collaboration and belief in the work we've done together have made this role an unforgettable experience and truly special. Warwickshire will always hold a special place in my heart and I look forward to continuing this work alongside all the remarkable individuals who make this county so strong.



At Chesford Grange Hotel, Leamington Spa, for a Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship passing out ceremony

Volunteering is vital

Melanie James JP

High Sheriff of West Glamorgan 2024-25

Like many I have volunteered in various organisations since I was a child. From charity shops and fundraising fayres to helping at the Guides as a young leader and, as an adult, a school governor, chair of the PTA and a long serving magistrate. My commitment and interest in giving back has been an important part of my life and I value enormously the contribution that volunteers selflessly make to our society.

The year in office allows you to immerse yourself in the voluntary sector. We constantly hear that volunteers provide the bedrock to our communities and ask where we would be without them. As High Sheriffs we too are volunteers and our aim is to make a significant difference to our community.

I decided that I wanted to recognise the wonderful volunteers in West Glamorgan and to raise as much awareness for the often unsung heroes in our community; so, I set myself a challenge. Namely, to volunteer in as many organisations as possible during Volunteers' Week across the two counties [The City and County of Swansea and Neath Port Talbot County Borough]; to stand side by side with the indispensable people within our vital third sector and to roll my sleeves up.

I contacted both Swansea and Neath Port Talbot Council for Voluntary Service and asked them to fill the week commencing 3 June 2024 for me – and they did not disappoint! Six placements and two recognition ceremonies in one week. Here goes!

The mother and toddler group



With young people from the Resolven Youth Forum

at Swansea EYST (an organisation supporting ethnic minority people across Wales) was where I met parents and their babies and toddlers helping to serve refreshments and also taking on rhyme and story time.

At Cwtch Mawr in Swansea I picked and packed orders. Cwtch Mawr is an amazing multibank; supported by businesses like Amazon and run by the Faith in Families charity it provides surplus essentials to those in need.

I played bingo with the ladies at Gwynfi Miners Community Hall in Blaengwynfi, where they hold a long-running coffee morning to combat isolation.

In Neath I packed food boxes at F.A.N. (Friends and Neighbours) Community Alliance and delivered them to those in need.

I helped pupils from Tairgwaith Primary School in Canolfan Maerdy in the Upper Amman Valley to pack food boxes and distributed them to families.

In Resolven I helped restock the food bank at the Building Blocks Family Centre and attended the Youth Forum, an incredible group of young people who



With other volunteers at Canolfan Maerdy food bank

volunteer in their community.

The week also included two fantastic volunteer awards ceremonies where I was delighted to give an address and present certificates.

Volunteers' week was wonderful and insightful. Needless to say, following on from this week I have continued to volunteer in as many places as possible. 'Don't just invite me to shake hands, give me a job instead' is very much my ethos and my past 11 months have been filled with wonderful experiences.

Volunteering is vital and encompasses so many things: empathy, teamwork, kindness, contribution, worth, confidence building, friendship and so much more – and all while making life for others easier. A gift!

Volunteers' Week this year is Monday 2 June through to Sunday 8 June – go for it!



At the Cwtch Mawr multibank – a clothes bank, bedding bank, baby bank, hygiene bank and furniture bank all rolled into one



With parents and their babies and toddlers at the EYST parent and toddler group in Swansea

Showcasing the county's rich cultural heritage

Douglas Wright MBD DL

High Sheriff of the West Midlands 2024-2025

As my term as High Sheriff of the West Midlands comes to a close, I find myself reflecting on a year filled with extraordinary experiences, meaningful engagements and the privilege of serving our community. It has truly been a fascinating and rewarding journey, allowing me to witness first-hand the dedication and resilience of volunteers and individuals committed to making a difference.

Over the past year, I have completed 165 engagements, each providing a unique opportunity to connect with the diverse voices of our community. From civic visits to local organisations and schools, these engagements have reinforced my belief in the power of social cohesion and community spirit.

One of the highlights of my year was hosting High Court judges from the Midlands Circuit at various events, including a local Champions League football game, a cricket match at Edgbaston, a ballet at the Birmingham Hippodrome and a dinner. These occasions not only celebrated the arts and sport but also fostered connections between the judiciary and our vibrant community. It was a privilege to bring together such distinguished guests in settings that showcased the rich cultural heritage of our region.

In addition to these events, I had the honour of recognising the remarkable contributions of individuals across the West Midlands. I proudly handed out 40 High Sheriff's Awards to court staff who have gone above and beyond in their duties, acknowledging their dedication to justice and service. Furthermore, I presented 66 High Sheriff's Awards to community members who have made



At Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College with St John Ambulance Cadets

significant contributions in various fields, celebrating their exceptional commitment to volunteerism and mentorship. Hearing their inspiring stories reinforced my belief in the positive impact we can all have on our community.

Throughout my year, I also had the pleasure of attending several civic services which provided a platform to celebrate our shared values and commitment to community service. These occasions served as important reminders of our collective responsibility to support and uplift one another.

A particularly memorable experience was my day spent at Birmingham Law Court as part of the Intensive Supervision Court (ISC) pilot programme. Observing the judicial process and engaging with the dedicated professionals working within the system deepened my appreciation for the rule of law and the vital role that our courts play in ensuring justice.

My visits to community organisations allowed me to witness the incredible work being done to support vulnerable populations. From food banks to youth mentorship programmes, these organisations are essential in addressing



At the opening of Coventry Law Courts with Dame Sue Carr, the Lady Chief Justice

the challenges faced by many in our communities. It was inspiring to see the passion and commitment of those involved and I was honoured to lend my support to their efforts.

Following the implementation of my High Sheriff's Magistrates Recruitment Programme I had the pleasure of speaking at Joseph Leckie School alongside two magistrates, promoting the important work of magistrates and encouraging students to consider careers in law and public service. Similarly, my visit to Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College provided an opportunity for my High Sheriff's cadets to share their experiences and highlight the importance of volunteering. Their enthusiasm and dedication to volunteering roles were truly commendable.

As my term as High Sheriff comes to an end, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has supported me throughout this journey. It has been an incredible honour to serve as High Sheriff of the West Midlands and I look forward to seeing how future High Sheriffs will build upon the foundations laid this year.



Presenting High Sheriff's Awards to the court staff at the ISC pilot at Birmingham Magistrates' Court

Connecting people with nature

Dr Olivia Chapple OBE

High Sheriff of Wiltshire 2024-25

Through the charity I founded called Horatio's Garden, I have developed a special interest in gardens and health, so during the course of my shrieval year I tried to visit as many charities as possible across the county which use nature as therapy in many different ways – many of these are connected to long-term crime prevention.

I've been so pleased to get to know many of the charities both small and large working in this sector and my abiding memory is that every visit to an outdoor project brought me in contact with happy people – beneficiaries, staff and volunteers – even when the weather was dire!

Wiltshire's prison, Erlestoke, has an incredible horticulture programme run by Mike Angell. Mike leads a thriving prison garden – every spare meter of ground around the site is beautifully planted and tended by prisoners who develop life-long hobbies or skills they can use to find employment on release. I was delighted to present Mike with a High Sheriff's Award.

Another highlight visit was to a forest school on the wettest, muddiest day imaginable and seeing children with complex neurodivergent traits happy and engaged while leaping about in the mud. The facility of the forest school enables this group of children to attend mainstream school thus improving their life opportunities.

I have been so excited to see nature being harnessed brilliantly in Wiltshire. This year Coronation Orchards have been planted in 29 communities around the county; I've seen schools creating calming gardens; churches reimagining their graveyards into community sanctuary gardens; young people not in education finding new purpose; and elderly care settings where residents are getting involved with growing.

I hosted a Connecting People with Nature seminar in June and invited people working and volunteering in the sector across the county to attend. We listened to inspiring speakers, shared ideas and practices and even did a group garden-based Qigong session!

The evidence that nature is good for us all is overwhelming and in these cash-strapped times, the health, economic



At my summer party in Horatio's Garden, Salisbury with Mohammed Makram Ali DL and police cadets

and crime prevention arguments are compelling – I hope the seeds of change are here to stay in Wiltshire and I have been grateful to be able to connect the many people who are driving the nature-based initiatives forwards across the county. I hope these connections will continue and will be pursuing this year's foundations going forwards. One of these initiatives is working with Wiltshire Police to create a garden for their workforce to support and prevent mental health difficulties.

The year also gave me the opportunity to hear from many of the smaller diverse charity chairs and I was struck by how many spoke of the loneliness of facing countless operational and governance challenges and their worries about succession. As a result, I formed Wiltshire Charity Chairs Network as an inclusive group to facilitate more contact with peers, to create networking opportunities, learning and mutual support. We've had three face-to-face meetings and already have a membership of 80 chairs from across the county... and growing. I will be ensuring that this is a sustainable group beyond my year in office with the intention of supporting and encouraging charity



At Salisbury park run



At a dance celebration in the Hindu temple, Swindon

chairs who are so vital to our communities.

The year has given me a small insight into the goodness of people in our county. There are so many unsung heroes who work and volunteer for the good of others whether supporting people directly or indirectly. We are so fortunate to have such dedication and our communities thrive because of them.

Engage with your local 'chain gang'

Charles Moyle JP

High Sheriff of Worcestershire 2024-25

In addition to the fundamental roles that come with being a High Sheriff I had two key objectives for my year. The first was to examine as many iterations of my 'Life Chances' theme as possible and the second was to get as close as I could to the grassroots charities operating throughout the county.

First, Life Chances: using county-wide rugby clubs as both the base and metaphor for what a team and family look and feel like, we invited 100 educationally excluded young men to join a weekly course. These courses focused variously on debt management; what it feels like and means to be part of a team; how to treat girls; and the dangers of county lines. The final course was hosted by the playing members of the club where they showcased and encouraged the boys to consider work experience as builders, electricians, cooks and plumbers. Will it work? Who knows... time will tell but if you can offer young people the opportunity to work they will quickly understand the benefits of the three Ss – structure, salary and self-respect.

Another iteration of Life Chances came from working with the police cadets in North Worcestershire. The cohort of 25 16- to 18-year-old boys and girls were so proud to wear the uniform and I wanted



With Harriett Baldwin MP inspecting the North Worcestershire Police Cadets before giving her 'VIP Journeys In Life' talk

to give them a range of experiences they wouldn't normally take part in. Each month they attended a talk from an inspirational Worcestershire high achiever. From the Lord-Lieutenant to an army general, from the director of nursing to a local MP, from a senior police officer to a local entrepreneur – each individual explained how they got to where they are today, the challenges they faced and the 'golden nuggets' of life advice they could offer within their 'VIP Journeys In Life' talk.

There are so many ways of bringing Life Chances alive – it's a wonderful theme to explore for any High Sheriffs in nomination to consider.

Second, county causes – the volunteer sector has never played a bigger part in picking up the roles which historically have been funded and delivered by local councils and government departments. But how does one discover just what is going on in the county and who is delivering often lifesaving services?

I approached all 11 mayors and district council chairs and requested that they give me one day of their time to introduce

me to all the extraordinary causes in their towns. The results were amazing. Each civic leader created a wonderful programme of visits of between six and eight charities and community organisations. We booked the local press to join us and asked each charity to invite their volunteers, staff, donors and trustees to meet with the mayor and myself.

I have learnt such a huge amount from each organisation I've visited and in many cases have had the greatest of pleasure in helping them – whether by developing their marketing strategy, assisting with funding applications or by introducing and signposting other useful organisations and, finally, returning in full 'kit' to recognise these community heroes by presenting High Sheriff's Awards and medals. It has been the most worthwhile and rewarding part of my year and I'd encourage all High Sheriffs in nomination to engage as quickly as possible with their local 'chain gang' – these men and women are your gate keepers to what is going on right under our noses.



Presenting awards to Polish community leaders at Hartlebury Castle in recognition of their commitment to participating and integrating the wider community into charitable service in Worcestershire



'Life Chances' Awards given in recognition of both great personal development having overcome significant challenges and for their contributions to our county

