

Am I enjoying myself?



At my installation with Duchy of Lancaster representatives Alastair Martin CVO (CEO and Clerk to the Council) and Sir James Leigh-Pemberton CVO (Chairman)

James Carter DL

High Sheriff of Lancashire 2025-26

I am now into the second half of my year as High Sheriff of Lancashire and, understandably, people keep asking me: 'are you enjoying yourself?' It is a simple question and in most cases is just an attempt at small talk, but I keep thinking to myself – how to answer. I suppose an honest response would be 'some of the time'. The role is so varied it can't be described as simply enjoyable.

To be High Sheriff is an honour I could not have imagined receiving coming from a relatively humble background with an ambition to just 'do my best'. In my various voluntary roles my mantra was always 'try to make a difference'. So there are two rules that I apply to events, invitations and functions. Accept those invitations where I can 1) make a difference and 2) approach them with enthusiasm so I can do my best. The role is so varied it can't simply be described enjoyable. It would need a paragraph of adjectives to do it justice.

The splendour of the service at Lancaster Priory, followed by the ancient

ceremony of hanging my coat of arms in Lancaster Castle, must rank as the high point on the scale of enjoyment and a great occasion to share with family and friends. My best friend had travelled all the way from New Zealand to be with me.

But if one does justice to the role it is so much more than the pomp and ceremony – it is the chance to make a difference to the huge number of voluntary organisations who often, quietly and unknown to many, go about their work and without whom the county would be so much the worse off. It is often humbling and sometimes upsetting to see such need among sections of our society. It is an amazing voyage of discovery. Previously held beliefs are often shattered when you are given a chance to really engage.

When asked if I would consider being put forward for the Office of High Sheriff I consulted my wife of 40 years because I wanted the year to engage us both. I could not achieve nearly as much without her by my side and her spending hours each week on administration. Many an evening we collapse with a cup of tea and ruminate on all the experiences of the day.

As I geared up to take on the role I was keen to introduce the charity Getting Court to Lancashire, particularly because much of my charitable work has been with young people. However, the more I discovered the work of the many charities already active in this area the more my ideas started take a different direction. So much good work was being undertaken but often those in need were not even aware of the help and advice that was available. Even more disappointing was the fact that some of the charities and organisations were not aware of each other and were sometimes bidding for the same scarce financial resources. So I decided that my ambition would be better served by trying to turbocharge what was already on offer. I am now working with the University of Lancashire in mapping the existing landscape with a view to producing a comprehensive database of every resource that is available in the county.

My work at Lancaster prison has also taken on much greater significance as I better understand the issues that many in our communities face and, in particular, the shortage of funding available to support vital initiatives.

To finish, I have found it to be an incredible honour, often very humbling, a near vertical learning curve and yes, of course, some very enjoyable moments.



With my wife Annabel and founder Sheila Byrne (back right) at Hope Street Café, Ormskirk – offering a safe, welcoming space for people facing mental health challenges