

Volunteering – a huge part of everyday life

Sally Roberts

High Sheriff of Powys 2025-26

Having started my year in office with a huge amount of trepidation – thinking that the role was completely daunting and beyond me – six months into it, I cannot believe how much I am enjoying it. Someone said it ‘opens so many doors to you’ and that is absolutely true. The places you get invited to and the people you meet are so inspirational and interesting that every event has been different but rewarding. I feel that each visit or occasion attended gives me so much more than I can ever give back – and am always surprised how grateful people seem to be when you go to their place of work or their organisation or their charity.

This year of course has been a lot about commemoration – with the 80th anniversary events of VE and VJ Days focussing thoughts on those who gave so much for all of our futures in this country. So many moving tributes were quite rightly paid to so many exceptional people. However, my very first event, the day after my Declaration, was a commemoration of a different kind – for a church built 125 years



ago for a community who were ‘cleared out’ of their homesteads in mid Wales to provide water for the folk of Birmingham. It was all the more poignant to me personally

A new church, the Nantgwyllt Chapel of Ease, was built to replace the original St Mark’s Church at Nantgwyllt when the valley was flooded to create the Elan Valley reservoirs
Photo: Gareth Thomas

as my husband’s family had gone through exactly the same situation a little further north c.20 years before when Lake Vyrnwy was created, flooding their land to provide much needed clean water for the people of Liverpool.

Travelling round the roads of Powys, especially in the wonderful spring and summer weather we have had this year, has been superb, taking me on roads and byways that I have never travelled

before. Talking with other High Sheriffs in Wales who are more ‘city based’ in Cardiff or Swansea, for example, has highlighted how different regions of the country influence the role of High Sheriff. While I have on average three or four events per week, they were saying that they may have three or four in a day! But when we then take into account the geography of the counties, although I have occasionally attended three events in one day, it wouldn’t physically be possible across many days.

Just going to the headquarters of some of our emergency services – which I have found fascinating – took me more than six hours of driving to get there and back. (Powys occupies a quarter of the area of Wales but only has four per cent of the population – and the HQ is not even in our county!) I particularly enjoyed the visit to the fire and rescue service headquarters and learning about all the other activities that they do besides fighting fires which accounts for only c.11 per cent of their activity. They educate all of us – if we want to be educated – on how to manage or (better still) avoid fires; check our



Resilience, The Red Dress Embroidery Project exhibition in Brecon showing the strength of (mainly) women working together – an embroidered silk gown with contributions from c.400 people in 51 countries