

Well what a year. To paraphrase many :

2 monarchs

3 Prime Ministers

5 Chancellors of the Exchequer

1 War

And that was just the first half.

I have had the most wonderful, life-enhancing, fabulous 12 months. I cannot begin to cover all the wonderful organisations , people, schools, clubs that I have met over the year. I am so grateful to them all for their invitations and kindness. I am bound to forget someone if I try and list all of them and would be mortified. I am therefore going to try and give you a snapshot of my rollercoaster ride.

The biggest event of the year was undoubtedly the death of Her Majesty. Although I was prepared with mourning clothes etc, I never really expected her to go on 'my watch'. Reading the proclamation outside the West Door of the Cathedral was an amazing piece of History and I was humbled and proud to be part of it with many of those here today. It is a special connection, we will never lose. I thought Herefordshire rose to the occasion magnificently, for which many thanks to Colonel Andy Taylor and his team. Although I did have to remind Andy on a zoom call I took in Salzburg business lounge on my mad dash to get back in time, that I was not the Lord Lieutenant with his 7 ft legs and sensible shoes but much shorter and in heels and I would need a step to get onto the platform.

To say I astonished myself by not crying whilst reading the Proclamation is a complete understatement. The one thing I have discovered this year is that I am a blubber, a cryer, a howler. At the drop of a hat I can fill entire swimming pools with tears. Rising sea levels are entirely due to my lachrymose output over the year and nothing to do with global warming. I awarded several High Sheriff certificates for community service over the year, including to the wonderful Hartley family, father and 2 sons, aged 16 and 12 who saved a woman from committing suicide on Hereford bridge. I couldn't get through the citation without crying and had to be comforted by same 12 year old. I was also overcome at the Remembrance Service at Sterling Lines, laying a wreath. The Last Post, the names of the SAS who had died in the Falklands and then the 2 helicopters coming over very low, throwing out poppies, did for me completely and I had to be helped by several very handsome members of the regiment. Or , at least, that's my story and I'm sticking to it.

My focus has been on our county's youth and keeping them out of the criminal justice system. To that end I have visited the secondary schools and have been incredibly impressed with the commitment and dedication of the staff I have met. I started at each school doing at least 1 School Assembly - 20 minutes in front of 250 or so teenagers. Sheer torture. I think it was at Aylestone with the Yr 10s when there was not one hand up when I asked if anyone had any questions. However when I said anyone who asked a question could hold the sword. 250 15 yr olds stood up and marched towards the front. I soon learnt to mention that first. From there I managed to talk to student councils, law students and various other parts of the school. I also finally managed to talk to several pupil referral units, for those about to be excluded which is where I wanted to be. It is extraordinary how misinformation gets round and I think it was at Bishops where the 7 boys in their referral unit were insistent that they could carry a knife up to 3 inches long and it was fine. I had to show them the sentencing guidelines to make them believe me. They were shocked - as was I.

I didn't target the primary schools but visited when they asked me, which was I was delighted to do. All of them were super but I would like to have a special shout out for St Marys, Credenhill who are just wonderful. Primary school children ask some fantastic questions and millions of them. Each one I visited asked how old I was and there invariably an audible intake of breath when I told them. I like to think that they were astonished as I looked much younger but I think they were astonished anyone lived to that age. Other great questions: how big is the queen? Do I ride my horse to chase the red indians (Wigmore Primary) but the best question of the year was from a police cadet - Do I have a tattoo? The answer's No by the way.

I have developed very close links with both the police and Fire Service over the year and hope that I have supported them in way that they support our community. The Police have so many initiatives to help, including the South Wye Police boxing academy and the Leominster Police Boxing Club. They both hold a black tie charity boxing night - please do go if you get a chance, they are fantastic. Also with Hereford Bulls - Gen Z Youth Hub - shout out to Jon Nash and PC Darren Ashton, who run a twice weekly safe space and free hot supper for our most troubled youth. I thought I was very popular there as the boys were always asking me when I coming to visit next until I discovered when I came, they got pizza..... I have loved my visits to Hindlip, the West Mercia HQ although they refuse to let me fire a semi-automatic assault rifle, spoilsports and Chief Constable Pippa sends someone out to count the police dogs each time I leave, in case I have purloined one. Gunnar, by the way, is my favourite.

I have also had a great time with the Fire Service who took Charles and I on the most brilliant tour of Leominster Fire station with all the kit. The highlight was a trip up in the high platform well over Leominster. Everything was going very smoothly until the Fire Officer who was with us, said if the platform broke down we would have to climb the 130ft down a ladder. I replied that on the contrary he would be climbing down to fetch me a cup of tea and would be calling Worcester for their platform to come and rescue me - I do heights I don't do ladders. Some days later I caught Charles looking at hydraulic bolt cutters online as obviously 'every household' needs some.

One of the many many things I have learnt over my term is that many charities help the intended but also provide a vital lifeline for the carers. I am thinking in particular of both Growing Point, who help the disabled garden and also Cafe Muse who provide music and companionship to veterans with dementia or their relatives . In both cases their activities provide a vital life line to the carers and gives them some respite time and other carers to talk and have a cup of tea with. There are many knock on benefits to charities , which we forget at our peril.

I have had several initiatives over the year which I want to tell you about.

A - Will Lindsay and I have set up, what we have termed, the Youth Provision Forum, which I will continue to chair. This is a quarterly 'get-together of all the organisations that deal with youth in the county, the charities, the council, the police, youth justice service, social workers, the schools. So far we have had 2 seminars and they have gone very well, with some very positive outcomes It has been a chance to work together and learn from each other.

B- Youth clubs/ Hubs. I have been very keen to support initiatives to provide spaces for youth in differing parts of the County. We have plans afoot in Leominster, Clehonger, Kington and Ledbury. There has been a lot of youth engagement on what they would want to see. I am very hopeful about all these projects.

C. The Shrieval Lecture was held in October about the Herefordshire Hoard and the role that the police and judiciary played in catching the 'miscreants' and getting them to prison. It was sold out, raised money for the High Sheriff Fund and was great fun. We even had a couple from Lincolnshire who had come over for it. Huge thanks to Superintendent Edd Williams and the archeologist Cat Jarman for a splendid evening. There are still plans afoot to

make a documentary about the story, which can only be good for the County.

D. Now onto my bete noire. Herefordshire has not had a Crown Court for about 3 years since the Shirehall had to be closed. This is an absolute County disgrace and it is causing chaos. All cases are being held in Worcester which means that not only defendants, but witness', family members, police witness', probation, the youth justice service and solicitors have to travel to Worcester by 9.30am for a 10am start. Good luck with that on public transport for many parts of the county. If you complain about the lack of police on the streets - think of trying to organise a rota when police witness' have to take a day out to travel and stay in Worcester until they are called. At present the judges are having to sit and tell defendants and witness; that the trial will not be heard until November 2024, there is such a case backlog. I can't remember what happened last week so good luck trying to get a witness to remember 3 years back. In addition no Herefordshire resident can be a juror - it is based on the electoral register, we are disenfranchised. We need a Crown Court in this County and we need it NOW.

Couple of things I want to say now my time has nearly ended:

1. For those that don't want any youth hubs\ clubs in the village halls or near them. I say we don't look after our young we are failing our families, our community and our county. 'Suffer the little children'.... Community spaces are not just for 'nice' people.
2. To the Lady that came out of the County Service for the Queen and said I shouldn't be so pleased with myself as a bird had died for my hat. I say: the plumes came 6 in a pack from amazon for £1.80 including post and packing. I am fairly certain they're not real.
3. To the person that said it didn't matter that Herefordshire residents couldn't be jurors as no one wanted to be one anyway. I say we all have rights as citizens of our country. But we also have duties and responsibilities and we throw them away at our peril. These are long hard won liberties and we should not take them for granted.
4. To several people who have said we've had enough women High Sheriffs for a while. I am the 10th very proud woman to have held this post out of the 1091 names Herefordshire High Sheriffs. I suggest women do the next 1000 years to level things up a bit.

Now onto my thanks,

Firstly to my wonderful High Sheriff Help - Jacob, who has kept me on the social media straight path this year. He has been a delight to work with, has made my life so much easier and is incredibly discreet, much to his mother's annoyance. Thank you dear Jacob.

A huge thank you to all the many many volunteers in this county, running charities, driving minibuses, working in food banks, the list is endless— you are amazing. For instance David Owen of the Scouts, who has been a volunteer for 65 years and Tracy Ricketts, who did a 24 hour spinathon for the Veterans Support Centre - you are my heroine. Oh and I should mention that she ran a mile in that 24 hours too.

I also want to mention both the Herefordshire Community Foundation and Hvoss, who do outstanding work for the County and have been such a help and support to me this year. Thank you.

Many thanks also go to the Cathedral, Bishop Richard, Dean Sarah and Andrew Piper. It has been a truly wonderful experience doing so much with them this year. I, of course, also want to thank Father Abbot and Belmont Abbey, it holds a very special place in my families hearts. And beloved Father Simon, my Chaplain for the year. Always a guide and mentor, I shouldn't have been surprised when so many people came up to me after my Declaration to say how special he was. Including, and I don't think he will mind me mentioning it - a previous High Sheriff, Bill Jackson, who pointed out that Father Simon was his spiritual guide, which was quite something coming from a Northern Irish protestant. Thank you dear Father Simon.

Now a very special mention. I am sure many of you will have realised that the Under Sheriff, Jeremy Wilding is not able to be here. He is recuperating after an operation, is definitely getting better but was just not well enough to attend. The awful part is that this is Jeremy's last "hurrah" as he is stepping down from his role today. I know I speak for all 'his' 13 HSs, from Elizabeth Hunter to myself and say the most enormous thank you for all his hard work over the years. Jeremy is the epitome of an Under Sheriff, discreet, knowledgeable, kind and always there when you need him. He is a true joy to work with.

Having said that I am delighted to welcome Thomas Bagley, who very shortly will be taking over officially as Under Sheriff. He has been thrust into the role prematurely by Jeremy's recuperation and has already proved himself to be an Under Sheriff in the same mould. Welcome Tom, I know you will carry on from Jeremy in the same wonderful fashion.

Also a warm welcome to Robert. I know you will be a fabulous High Sheriff and if you have half the fun, laughter and joy from your year as I have had you will have the time of your life.

To my beloved Charles and the family, who has put up with me banging on endlessly about Crown Court, has provided me with hankies at all times and who have never failed to support me. We can go racing more again now.

From St Lukes Gospel we powerfully get the message that Christ is about service rather than domination and this is what I have tried to do this year.

Finally, Thank you Herefordshire.