

## NACTSEW Chair's Report, Norwich 2023 – David Brown

A theme that has been growing in importance over the last 12 months is, in my view, the need to guard our heritage and keep up traditions. I included a short article in my Summer Newsletter to that effect and I will build on that here.

NACTSEW understands that the Sheriff's role is extremely important, providing Civic encouragement for our communities. The Sheriff can, as a representative of the City or Town, bring people together and 'lift the mood', of volunteer groups especially. The Coronation of King Charles III in May showed very clearly, on a grand scale, how tradition can bring people together and lift the mood. We have all seen that effect at a local level and recognise its importance.

Traditions make up our local heritage, a part of our local culture, and we mustn't let that go. Recently I was honoured to be invited to join the annual Lichfield Sheriff Ride. It was a magnificent occasion with dozens of horses and riders taking part, throughout the morning and afternoon. COVID interrupted this tradition for a couple of years but tremendous efforts by the Lichfield Shrievalty team, against setback after setback, ensured this wonderful tradition continues.

In a few weeks' time, the Sheriff of Gloucester will have the arduous task of ensuring the quality of beer in 'hostelries' across the City is of a good standard – the Assize of Ale. As they say, "somebody has to do it"! It's a duty which continues for Sheriffs in other parts of England and Wales also. Such traditions, and there are many more, I believe are important.

On the flip side, I was really saddened to see in the national media this week how one act of mindless vandalism destroyed a longstanding symbol of national heritage, subsequently lowering the mood of countless people in one fell swoop. I refer to the chainsaw attack and cutting down of the iconic 300-year-old tree at Hadrian's Wall. Very sad.

It feels like our heritage and traditions are also under threat in a more subtle way. Not just the result of mindless acts by individuals, but also as the result of reducing Council budgets. The way Lichfield and others have responded to keep things going is remarkable and an example to us all.

In the extreme, the frightening end-game of reducing budgets could see some councils looking at attempting to do away with the role of Sheriff. Members, please be on your guard against such threats to our traditions and heritage, to our Civic role. We must keep a focus on the encouragement and lift a Sheriff's visit can give to a local volunteer groups, local business, and other organisations.

Looking more inwardly, I have been working on an update of our 30th anniversary book. This book came about as a collaboration between Barrie Ferguson (York 2000) who was Chair 10 years ago, and Peter Barrett (Lichfield 1995), who sadly is no longer with us. Peter was Vice Chair at the time.

I will ask Barrie for his blessing to use some of his content, which is excellent. For those who have not seen a copy, it includes a page of information about each city and town with a list of their Sheriffs from 1985 up until 10 years ago. We're coming up to the 40th anniversary and it feels like the time is right to publish an update. I welcome suggestions on what people would like included.

Looking back at the year since we met in Berwick in 2022, I can report on the following. I issued a statement on the Coronation of King Charles III and, with thanks to Xena Dion, this was published on our website within hours of the Coronation ceremony ending. Thanks also to Xena for sending my

Summer Newsletter to those members using email. I very much appreciate all those who responded with such kind comments.

I ensured that those who do not have e-mail received a printed copy by post and in my covering letter I asked for feedback on their local Shrievalty. I was delighted to receive lovely phone calls from Randolph Meech (Poole) and Doris Bell (York). Doris informed me she would attend this weekend, at the age of 94, and we promised each other we would find the opportunity to chat.

I also sent letters of congratulations by post to the new Sheriffs as soon as I had their contact details.

With others on the National Committee, I have had Zoom meetings and email exchanges with the Norwich committee. At every stage my mind was put at ease that everything was under control and my confidence was not misplaced.

Along with the Honorary Life President, Andrew Gravells, I had a very encouraging Zoom meeting with the Mayor, Sheriff and Council Officers of Haverfordwest. All were enthusiastic and positive about hosting NACTSEW in 2024 and there was further encouragement when Andrew visited Haverfordwest and met some in person. I understand Andrew spoke with management at the local hotel about the possibility of a discount for Shrievalty Members in 2024.

I have several people to thank. We all know that organisations like NACTSEW do not just happen on their own. I have mentioned Xena Dion (Poole) already. As well as updating members through email Xena does a tremendous job keeping the NACTSEW website 'current' and informative.

It's unfortunate Xena cannot be with us this weekend, I know she would ask for news about your local Shrievalty, and welcomes supporting pictures. I think it's very important that we present ourselves in a professional way to the world and Xena is doing that with the website.

I'd like to thank Andy Swinburne for his support as Vice Chair throughout the year. His experience and knowledge on the Committee is invaluable. Likewise, Jan Lugg has been a great support in the Treasurer's role, now being an extremely busy period. Not only that but Jan is wearing two hats today as she is also fulfilling the role of Secretary, at short notice. Thank you, Jan. It is unfortunate that Jeanne Storrar cannot be with us this weekend, much to her disappointment. I always appreciate Jeanne's attention to detail and will miss her guidance and encouragement this weekend.

Thank you to Andrew Gravells for his support over the year, especially in communicating with Haverfordwest regarding 2024. It was important to make personal contact and Andrew did that during his visit there.

Finally, I must thank Chris Higgins and every member of the Norwich Committee. I included their names in the Summer Newsletter. What a tremendously strong committee it is, and I've been aware of that since our first Zoom meeting. They have prepared a wonderful schedule for us this weekend. The work and preparations they have made upfront has paid off well, ensuring they are well placed to handle any last-minute adjustments.

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