

History of The High Sheriff of Hertfordshire

The post of High Sheriff is the oldest office in England, dating back to Saxon times when the King appointed a Shire Reeve to maintain justice and to keep the peace through the "Posse Comitatus".

The High Sheriff was empowered to appoint the deputies for the posse, and to collect the King's taxes. They are appointed annually by the Sovereign at a "pricking ceremony" in March, in front of the Privy Council, where the Queen uses a bodkin to mark the name of each High Sheriff throughout the 52 Counties. This ceremony dates back to an occasion when the Privy Council interrupted Queen Elizabeth I while she was busy with her embroidery.

While High Sheriffs no longer enjoy draconian powers, they remain the Sovereign's representative in the County for all matters relating to Law and Order. Their Royal Warrant requires them to protect Her Majesty's Judges, to attend members of the Royal Family when visiting the County, to act as Returning Officer at Parliamentary Elections, and to proclaim the accession of a new Sovereign.

After their Declaration Ceremony in which they swear loyalty and allegiance to Her Majesty, it is customary for them to host a Garden Party, normally in June, to which Judges, Officers of the Armed Forces, Statutory bodies and Voluntary Organizations in the County are invited.

In November the High Sheriff dedicates a service at St Albans Cathedral to Justice, at which he processes with the Judges, the Chief Constable and many Magistrates, Recorders, and Coroners all of whom work within the Justice System in Hertfordshire.

The office is independent, non-political and High Sheriffs are also encouraged to support voluntary bodies dealing with Crime Prevention, particularly young offenders. To this end High Sheriffs supervise the annual Crimebeat Awards which are presented in March to groups engaged with young offenders as well as the High Sheriff Awards designed to honour unsung heroes in the community. The Crimebeat Awards are to largely voluntary organizations who are involved in Crime Distraction as well as Crime Prevention. ■



Above: The High Sheriff with the Lord Lieutenant, Judges and neighbouring High Sheriffs at the Justice Service in November 2007 in front of the Shrine of St Alban