

Life in Lockdown - High Sherriff West Sussex

May 2021

Working with East Grinstead Museum, we have a series of *Life in Lockdown studies* on our website that capture the pandemic experience and issues from the point of view of Businesses, Individuals, and Community Groups.

About the Office of High Sheriff



The Office of High Sheriff is at least 1,000 years old having its roots in Saxon times before the Norman Conquest. The Shrievalty, as the office is known, is the oldest secular office under the Crown. Originally the office held many of the powers now vested in the Lord-Lieutenant, High Court judges, magistrates, local authorities, coroners and HM Revenue and Customs.

The office of High Sheriff remained first in precedence in the counties until the reign of Edward VII when an Order in Council in 1908 gave the Lord-Lieutenant the prime office under the Crown as the Sovereign's personal representative. The High Sheriff is appointed by the Sovereign and has a prime role of supporting the judiciary and those responsible for the maintenance of law and order but does not officially represent the Sovereign in such matters.

Modern precedence is defined by a Royal Warrant of 1904, as amplified by a Home Office Memorandum of 1928 whereby the High Sheriff takes precedence in the County immediately after the Lord-Lieutenant.

Life in Lockdown

Dr Tim Fooks, High Sheriff of West Sussex

'On March 11th 2020, I retired as a GP in Pulborough in preparation for my year - within 2 weeks I was back at work. *The prediction of at least one hundred Covid-related deaths a day*, in West Sussex alone, created a sense of urgency that had not been witnessed in the NHS since 1948. Every medical pair of hands was needed.



At the same time, my plans to be the first High Sheriff, let alone the first physician, to make their Declaration within West Sussex had to be rapidly changed and, instead of a major event in Chichester Cathedral, I began my shrieval year at home and on Zoom. *Little could I have predicted that my theme of 'safeguarding the vulnerable' would prove so appropriate.*



For me, cancelled shrieval events were replaced by '*Hot Hub' Covid clinics and Court Dress was exchanged for PPE.* Rapidly introduced new clinical practices to minimise the risk of infection spoke of the unprecedented danger of this novel infection and the public's weekly show of support for the NHS was greatly appreciated.

Although many lost their battle against the virus, thankfully, West Sussex was spared the worst. The local hospitals had just enough ventilator capacity in ITU and our Senior Coroner did not have to open the 'Nightingale' mortuaries which she had established.

However, my role as High Sheriff was by no means side-lined by medicine and, for me, three activities rapidly become paramount: *connecting, listening, and thanking.*

As plans for annual ceremonies and receptions were shelved, or moved on-line, so I became very busy adapting my role and proactively reaching out to connect with leaders from every sector across the county. In this, the administrative help of Julia Mansergh, who is also a local JP, has been invaluable.

There can be few years where a crisis has created so much uncertainty for, and required such a rapid and comprehensive response by, so many different elements of our society; the judicial, education and voluntary sectors all remain greatly challenged as have the police, prison and probation service.

Life in Lockdown

Listening to the key architects of our county's response to COVID-19 and, on behalf of West Sussex, thanking them and their colleagues for their *exceptional efforts has been, and continues to be, a deeply significant element of my role*. Perhaps it has never been so important.

However, the unique and independent position of a High Sheriff within the county has led to other opportunities and initiatives.

The inspiring acts of altruism and kindness carried out by individual members of the public, acting in a voluntary capacity, are being recognised in a new and specific Award. To replace my Summer Reception, I convened a zoom conference '*Tackling Loneliness Together*' which connected 120 representatives from every locality and sector of the county to focus on this very significant issue. I am currently visiting businesses to highlight their role in supporting communities to remain resilient and, once a week, the West Sussex local news media publishes my High Sheriff briefing so that I can inform the public about the great work going on in the county to support them.

There is certainly a great deal to write about.'



Life in Lockdown

East Grinstead Museum



East Grinstead Museum aims to spark a sense of place and belonging in East Grinstead's past, present and future, through the stories we share.

As part of our response to the COVID 19 Pandemic, we have documented life in lockdown. We want to capture diverse experiences - sad or joyful - and to reflect East Grinstead's diversity. Contributions are welcomed from people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities.

To learn more about this exhibition email: info@eastgrinsteadmuseum.org.uk

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We have a simple ambition, at Healthwatch West Sussex... to make local health and social care services better for people that use them. We are here to listen, take action and influence positive change for local people living in West Sussex.

We record what people tell us and share this anonymously with those who make decisions about our health and care services.

You can contact us in several ways:

-  **Telephone** 0300 012 0122
-  **Email** helpdesk@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk
-  **Website** www.healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk

You can also follow our social media channels to always be updated with the latest in health and social care news across West Sussex: [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#).

If you have questions about the content of this update, please either call 0300 012 0122 or email cheryl.berry@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk

