

The third talk, on 'the History of the Shrievalty and the role of the modern day High Sheriff,' was given on 1st November by Dr Christine Hill Williams, herself a former High Sheriff of Berkshire. In the hierarchy of constitutional figures after the Queen, the High Sheriff is the deputy to the Lords Lieutenant of each county and acts as the Queen's Representative in every county, plus London and Bristol. The High Sheriff is responsible for law and order while the Lord Lieutenant is responsible for everything else! The position goes back into the dim and distant past. However it seems that the position of High Sheriff can be dated back to the 7th century AD, long before government as we know it was in place. Then the role of the High Sheriff was fourfold: 1. to defend the monarch; 2. to raise an army to fight for the monarch; 3. to collect taxes; and 4. to escort judges. Needless to say over time the role has become largely ceremonial. Thus the High Sheriff escorts royal visits to his/her county; supervises citizen ceremonies; and acts as patron to the returning officer at Election times. A High Sheriff is appointed for one year only but four years in advance of taking up the post. A Shrieval Consultancy Panel seeks nominations and selects 4 people for the following four years. Nominees attend a special ceremony in the High Court in the Strand. It is up to each Sheriff to decide on his/her own particular interests to patronise. We felt honoured to be able to share in the highs and lows of a year in the life of this particular High Sheriff and left with minds buzzing.