

Wye residents can witness a Shrieval procession, a rare echo of over 1,000 years of Wye's history as a legal centre, on Sunday 2nd April. At a Service of Declaration in Wye Church George Jessel, a Deputy Lieutenant of Kent, will take his oath of office as High Sheriff of Kent.

Immediately before the Service, George Jessel as the High Sheriff Elect will process from the Latin School to the church at 12.20, where a private ceremony will commence at 12.30. He will be accompanied by the Lord Lieutenant of Kent, the Chief Constable, the Mayor of Ashford, judges, magistrates, chaplains and other dignitaries.

On previous occasions, such services have usually been held in small local churches. However, George Jessel, who farms at East Brabourne and on Wye Downs, chose Wye as he aims to focus attention on rural matters throughout his year in office. George Jessel said "As a local farmer with many friends and connections in Wye, I felt that Wye Church would be a wonderful setting to launch my High Sheriff year. In past years Wye had an enviable reputation for excellence in agriculture."

"The High Sheriff is the Queen's appointee and representative to the Judiciary and this of course will be my first priority, but as a 'Man of Kent' I am keen to lend my support to rural organisations which are often isolated and provide so much help to their communities. I am also passionate about education, and hope that during my year I can involve young people in the projects I support."

The office of High Sheriff is Anglo-Saxon in origin, and each year the Queen still appoints the nominee in Privy Council by 'pricking' their name on vellum with a silver bodkin. There is evidence that the custom dates to Henry VII. The oldest surviving record of a 'Scir-gerefa' in Kent is from 669AD, over two hundred years before King Alfred the Great's reign. At that time Wye was a royal manor in the independent kingdom of Kent, and it remained a royal manor until 1066.

Over 400 years later the Domesday Book recorded Wye as the administrative centre for the Lathe of Wye, a substantial area of land which stretched from Faversham to Hawkhurst. Moreover, as Edward [Hasted](#) observed in 1797 "for such was the dignity of this manor, which then consisted of seven sulings, or hides of land, that, as the antient book of this [Battle] abbey expressed it, with its own hundred, it had jurisdiction over twenty-two hundreds and an half, which belonged to its court."

For centuries the shyrereeve or sheriff was directly accountable to the monarch for defence and the maintenance of law and order within each shire, or county. In a time before the police, judges, magistrates, and HMRC existed, the sheriff had responsibility for all these vital state functions. In times of emergency the office holder had the power to summon to arms all able-bodied men aged over 15 to form the posse comitatus - the full power of the county; to make arrests; collect taxes and levies; preside over courts; deal with traitors, and act in all matters on the King's behalf. Given the breadth of these powers at the time of Magna Carta, it is not surprising that twenty seven of the sixty-three clauses in that document addressed matters relating to the office of sheriff.

Throughout medieval times being the Sheriff of Kent remained very much a hands-on job, which carried heavy physical and financial risks. In 1450, three years after Archbishop Kempe founded Wye College, one former Sheriff was beheaded during the Jack Cade rebellion. In 1485 another Sir Robert Brackenbury, died loyal to his oath of allegiance to King Richard III, fighting beside him at Bosworth.

Although Kent is at peace and the remaining duties attached to the office of High Sheriff are now ceremonial, the ancient connection between the Crown, the judiciary and law enforcement is still central. This historical link is reflected in the list of duties, which until very recently included being a witness at public executions, and the badge of office which has a royal crown and two crossed swords. Of these emblems the sword with its point cut off represents Mercy, and the pointed sword Justice.