

Message from the Chairman of Kent County Council



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It's in the Chairman's Diary every year; a visit to Canterbury to attend a graduation ceremony of students from Christchurch University. It was held in the cathedral, which meant wonderful music and the rewarding sight of three hundred students in academic dress with mortar boards aslant receiving their degree certificates from the Vice-Chancellor.

Thinking of cathedrals, I went to Rochester last week with the High Sheriff and the Mayor of Medway David Wildey and the Chief Executive of that Council to meet the Countess of Wessex, who was interested in the museum and crypt, now restored after a catastrophic flood in early 2016. She was tiny and beautiful and made me feel very old, ugly and worn out. Which I am. She arrived at the door of the cathedral in one of a fleet of blacked out Range Rovers, having parked her helicopter on a nearby playing field. I could hear socialists grinding their teeth. My Mazda was in the multi-story and it rained on the way back to it.

I had a smashing morning at the British Legion Village in Aylesford, where the Royal British Legion Industries (RBLI) has built twenty-four apartments for disabled servicemen, part of a much larger development. The land is available and, sadly, the colonial style bungalows along Hermitage Lane will have to go. A garden had been constructed from a design first displayed at the Chelsea Flower Show and a plinth erected to celebrate the day. This was unveiled by the Secretary of State, Sir Michael Fallon. The RBLI is a thoroughly commendable organisation, working for ex-servicemen in many different ways, giving them homes and useful work to do.

I had a day at the seaside on Saturday last, having been asked to present the Chairman's Cup to an outstanding sailor sponsored by the Kent Schools Sailing Association, a peripatetic organisation that trains young people to sail dinghies. It uses clubs around Kent and the event I attended was at The Downs Sailing Club at Deal, on the beach at the centre of the town. The Chairman concerned was Mrs Paddy Nesham, a great dinghy sailor and the County Council's first female chairman in the 1980s (there is a painting of her on the gallery in Sessions House); she awarded the cup in about 1980 to encourage young people to learn to sail.

I used to sail, although not well, and never understood that gybing did not have to be followed by a capsize and an undignified rescue. I learnt when I had become big and clumsy and it was wonderful to see young people handling Toppers and Lasers so adroitly in a stiff breeze with an opposing tide. It teaches them courage, resourcefulness, discipline and sound competitiveness, none of which I ever had on the water or anywhere else.